

Shopping for a fire pit



People have sat around an open fire outdoors for centuries. Not only does fire provide warmth and light, but also it offers a relaxing setting for conversation and socialization.

The outdoor fire pit has transformed the concept of backyard entertaining. Homeowners understand how a fire pit can add value to a home and make their yard an inviting place to be on a summer evening or a chilly autumn night.

Outdoor fire pits are a relatively new creation that continue to grow in popularity. Once available strictly through specialty retailers, fire pits can now be found on the shelves of many home improvement and big box stores as well as online.

Fire pits can add a lot to a home's exterior entertaining area. Some fire pit styles and materials will last longer than others. Homeowners should assess their needs and the space available before choosing a fire pit for their home.

First, homeowners must decide if they want a permanent or portable fire pit. If you are ready to make an enduring change to your yard and landscape, then a per-

manent fire pit is the way to go. These can be made of stone or brick and are often very durable. Permanent fire pits can be incorporated into landscape designs to create a professional patio look. They're also some of the safer types of fire pits because they cannot be knocked over and the bricks or retaining wall construction provide a barrier around the fire.

Portable fire pits are free-standing units that can be moved around the yard on a whim. They also can be loaded into the car and taken to a neighbor's house or even to the beach. Portable fire pits are less expensive than permanent models, and some homeowners prefer a trial run with a portable pit before deciding to install a permanent structure.

Portable fire pits are made of metal and usually coated with a fireproof paint. Over time, exposure to the elements can cause the metal to rust or weaken, something homeowners should consider prior to purchase.

Homeowners also must consider a fuel source. Wood is a common fuel source for fire pits. Wood can be inexpensive, especially when

gathered from around the yard. However, a wood-burning fire will constantly have to be fed with new branches. If you want to have a roaring fire but don't want to maintain it, then a gas-fueled fire pit is better. Natural gas fire pits can run off of a portable propane tank (think barbecue tank) or be directly connected to a home's natural gas supply.

Now you can decide on the style. Gas fire pits will give you a greater number of design options, but there are still plenty of choices with wood fire pits. From bowl-shaped pits to rectangular-shaped pits to barrel-style pits to chimineas, there are designs to fit most preferences and size constraints.

Once you have chosen a fire pit, safety should prevail. Here are some tips to consider.

* Keep the fire pit away from the home and objects that can burn. Maintain a safe distance from the fire pit at all times.

* The best place to have the fire pit is on hard stone, cement or tile. Portable fire pits can be placed on patio stones in the lawn.

* Use a screen to keep embers and sparks from escaping during use.

* Keep children a good distance away from the fire pit and always supervise when the pit is in use.

* Make sure the fire is completely extinguished before going in for the night.

* Do not use any accelerants to make the fire bigger or light faster.

* Buy a vinyl cover to protect the fire pit from the elements when not in use.

Green Ways to Beautify Your Home



(Photo courtesy of Getty Images)

When it comes to improving your home, it's easier than ever to make eco-friendly choices that save you money, are better for the environment and make your home more beautiful. Here are a few easy ways you can go green all over the house.

Light it Up - As you make the switch from incandescent bulbs, it's important to look for a bulb that will not only conserve energy and save money, but that gives you the kind of illumination you want. Look for an alternative with even light

distribution, such as 3M LED Advanced Light. It lights up a room as beautifully as you would expect, and lasts for 25 years, delivering energy efficiency without compromise. It uses one quarter of the energy used by an incandescent light bulb and can save you up to \$140 worth of electricity over the bulb's lifetime. In addition, it contains no mercury and does not need special disposal. Learn more at www.3MLighting.com/LED.

Decorate with Recycled Materials - Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or want to buy

ready-made items, there are plenty of options that keep materials out of landfills. Look for furniture made from reclaimed wood, carpets made from recycled plastic, flooring made from sustainable resources such as bamboo or cork, and wallpaper made from managed timber sources. You can find glassware, dinner sets and accessories made from recycled glass, and textiles like curtains and blankets made from organic fibers.

Save Water with Style - Upgrading your water-using devices can help you use less water and save money. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that products with the WaterSense or EnergyStar labels will cut down on your water usage. For example, replacing faucets and aerators with WaterSense models can save you an average of 700 gallons of water per year. Replacing your showerhead could save 2,900 gallons of water per year, and a new toilet could save you 13,000 gallons of water per year. Look for the EnergyStar label on dishwashers and washing machines - they can use up to half as much water and 40 percent less energy.

Clean Green - Keep your home sparkling clean with eco-friendly cleaners and detergents. Look for products with plant-based ingredients and that are free from artificial chemicals, colors and fragrances. And learn to make your own cleaners, too. Baking soda and vinegar are natural products with a lot of cleaning power.

Making some green improvements around your house is easier than you think - and the payoff is a beautiful home and a better environment.

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