

YOUR OUTDOOR HOME Patios, decks and modern furnishings

By Debra Cooper
Copley News Service

It's time to move outside. The whole world (more specifically, your yard) is waiting, full of fresh air, sunshine and soft breezes.

But is it ready?

To fully enjoy your home-outside-your-home, you need a lovely patio or deck, the right outdoor furniture and a few extras — such as an efficient barbecue.

Use the following tips to help you create your perfect warm-weather outdoor living (and entertaining) environment.

PATIOS

There are more options for a patio than a slab of concrete under an overhang outside your home's sliding glass door.

The trend today is toward enclosed patios. These are bright, airy sun rooms that capture heat and light with tall arched windows and skylights.

A contractor who specializes in patios can explain options such as garden windows, wood beam ceilings, brick or block walls, lattice covers, window awnings, sliding doors and more.

If all you really want is to cover

that ugly concrete slab, consider one of the new aggregate-and-epoxy surfaces. These create a smooth glistening coating of tiny pebbles that resemble a stream bed. The surface is durable enough to park on — and it completely covers cracks and other imperfections.

Other patio "paving" options you'll want to consider include tile, brick, slabs of stone and outdoor carpeting.

DECKS

According to lumber and hardware retailers, decks have become one of the top do-it-yourself home improvement projects.

Home owners are building decks on new homes and old ones, to fit around pools, play areas, trees, water gardens and hot tubs.

"It is something that normally just about any of the home owners can handle," says Joe Carter, owner of a lumber company.

Decks are a relatively inexpensive way to add living space. Carter says even the most elaborate deck wouldn't cost much more than \$4.25 per square foot in materials.

Experts suggest making a deck an extension of a high-traffic room. A deck set off a kitchen or a family room is far more likely to be useful than one extending from a back hallway or a little-used dining room.

In addition to consulting the experts at your local hardware and lumber stores, check your local bookstores and video dealers for helpful how-to information on deck building.

FURNITURE

The livin' has never been easier or more comfortable, thanks to new materials, finishes and designs for outdoor furniture.

The technology is impressive. Drench a chair or chaise with rain, pool or salt water: It won't rust. Scorching sun won't cause it to yellow, fade, split or crack. And it's cool, too, as well as comfortable and well-designed.

Colorful floral-print and striped umbrellas seem almost transparent, but don't let that fool you. They're made of a durable new vinyl-coated polyester mesh designed to screen out light and heat.

New polyester cushions are designed so that water simply runs through them; they're never soggy. When the sun comes out, the cushions dry as good as new, their colors as bright as ever. They also resist mildew and are tough enough for kids.

Outdoor chairs and tables made of tubular steel look elegant but require no upkeep — they're treated with a permanent finish.

Thanks to 20th century technology, the lacy designs of Victorian wrought-iron benches, tables and chairs are available today. They're virtually indestructible — outdoor furnishings experts describe them as "three generation furniture."

Wrought iron once came only in black or white, but now it's blooming in vivid brights and soft pastels.

Molded plastic lends itself to handsome and versatile pieces for porches, patios and gardens. A dining table converts to a coffee table; another becomes several small tables and a folding cart. Lacquered resins protect the surface from rain, saltwater and ultraviolet radiation.

Aluminum has the advantage of being lightweight and inexpensive, but it should be protected from the corrosive effects of seawater. Manufacturers suggest applying a coat of auto wax once a year.

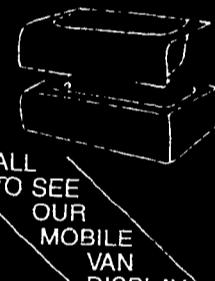
Director's chairs now come in three heights — counter, bar and standard. Canvas seats are available in a rainbow of colors, with finishes that resist mildew; vinyl seats also are bright and practical. If you entertain frequently, keep a stash of these folded in your garage, ready to go.

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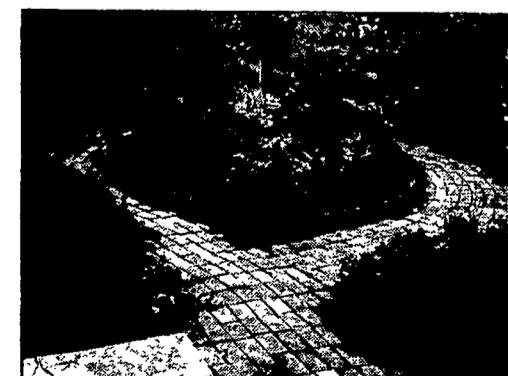
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