

Increase your living space—and your home's value

By J. Lennox Scott

Because Puget Sound residents spend so much of the year dealing with wet conditions, we look for any chance to be in the sun when the weather turns warm. Cooking and dining alfresco is arguably the single greatest thing about warm weather in the Pacific Northwest, but most backyard barbecues involve a million trips to and from the kitchen. As such, one of the hottest trends in new home construction is outdoor kitchens. Outdoor kitchens typically feature a comfortable eating area with a combination of cabinets, sinks, warming drawers, prep counters, ranges, and refrigerators—all within arm's reach of the grill. Outdoor kitchens provide a natural gathering spot for friends and family and can add to the value of your home.

How elaborate your outdoor kitchen should be depends on how often you plan to use it. Some people enjoying dining outdoors every evening, while others reserve it for special occasions and social gatherings. Regardless of the frequency of use, you need to use materials that do well in all kinds of weather. Stone sinks, stainless steel cabinets, and slate countertops will withstand the Seattle rain, as well as the months that pass between barbecue seasons. Many outdoor kitchens also feature pergolas or other roof structures to shield guests from sun and rain. Something else to consider is adding an outdoor gas heater or fireplace, which will extend the amount of time you can use your outdoor kitchen into the fall and winter months.

In addition to the convenience of having all your grilling accoutrements within a handy distance, a well-built outdoor kitchen also adds to the value of your home. And you don't have to have a new home to reap the benefits. With the right space and backyard layout, owners of existing homes can easily add-on an outdoor kitchen area. When adding an outdoor kitchen to an existing home, power, gas, and water lines often have to be extended from the home, so be sure to hire a qualified contractor to do the work for you. By extending your living space outside, you have essentially increased the square footage of your home. In many cases the increase in your home's value will equal or even sometimes exceed the cost of the project itself.

The benefits of an outdoor kitchen area and living space are many. And with the convenience of having your drinks, condiments, meat, and cooking space all in one easy-to-reach place, you can spend the precious summer moments right where you should—outside with friends and family.

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