

# OUTDOOR LIVING

*Creative ways to enhance your home's exterior living space*

**B**eeing up your exterior is essential to adding overall value to your home. Enhancing your landscaping can add 15 to 70 percent payback, and it's easier than ever because interior design ideas are migrating outdoors and new shapes, colors, textures and amenities abound. Homeowners who are planning exterior design changes need to think of the outdoors as an extension of the house's interior living space.

## First Things First

Before a buyer or guest has even stepped inside they have already formed an impression. A well-kept garden, pathway and fence and even a freshly painted front door are immediately appealing.

A well-planned exterior also improves home security. Insurance agencies put a great value on landscaping, and will pay the several-hundred-dollar replacement value for trees struck by lightning.

Special exterior touches that add value to your home don't have to cost a fortune. Simply sprucing up the most tired parts of a house can often make a big difference. As extensions of indoor living areas, patios, porches and decks require accessories that will make these spaces as joyful and attractive as possible.

## Create More Space

The most affordable way to extend the interior is with a screened-in porch. For those who can't afford a sunroom, a covered porch with storm windows is a more affordable option. Storm windows made to order can replace more expensive insulation such as air conditioning, heat and electricity, while offering year-round accessibility. The screened-in porch is also ideal for homeowners who want to convert their deck into an outdoor room. Open porches and decks can be hard

to keep clean, unlike the covered version that stays clean and comfortable during intense summer heat and cold winter days.

To maximize the space and outdoor views with decorative touches, mix and match different types of windows to create a wall of glass. Screened in porches can transform into outdoor living rooms by utilizing special features from copper railing to luxurious outdoor furniture.

## Hit the Deck

A deck design should go beyond creating a flat surface. A note of caution: homeowners should avoid built-in benches on decks because of safety hazards and because permanent seating limits flexibility, space and view. The latest deck trends include:

Designs and patterns using composite materials and geometric designs on oversized decks to add interest and eliminate that "basketball court" feel.

Exterior lighting not only adds elegance but also extends outdoor entertaining time into the evening.

- Unusual shapes such as octagon and rounded corners vs. traditional rectangular.
- Signature details such as craftsman-style overhangs.
- Undercover systems to prevent exposure to weather such as screened in porch with second story deck.
- Breaking up space and adding interest to the space with directional and diagonal decking.
- Upgrading unusable space (steep sloped backyard) with deck and covered porches.
- Copper rails that maximize the view, add elegance and offers a neutral, natural look



By thinking of the deck as more than a floor outside, you can create a sanctuary that's functional and can be used year-round. Privacy screens, arbors, trellises and modified roofs create an outdoor room effect instead of a glorified patio. Overhead structures can help regulate the amount of sun hitting the deck and are ideal for covering the outdoor grill area. Rafters and shade-

boards with decorative designs also can create interesting light patterns on the deck throughout the day.

### **Serenity of Water**

No one can deny the power and attraction of water features. And it's never been easier for homeowners to add the sparkle and serenity of water to their own landscapes. To open a window and hear the sound of water running outside offers tremendous expressive potential and aesthetic value to the home, especially when the water stays close to its natural habitat—a concept that explains the higher asking prices of waterfront properties.

### **Stepping Stones**

Replacing your walkway is a great way to unleash your property's natural potential. Paving brick or stone over a natural path with granite screening creates an elegant look and can help keep weeds from peeking through. Stone and brick are the most durable and maintenance free materials you can utilize in your landscape. While creating outdoor spaces, you can use native slabs of granite that become a grand stairway or lichen covered field stone, dry stacked into a beautiful meandering garden wall.

### **Let Your Designs Blossom**

Consider planting flowers both in beds and in containers. People often forget that they can expand beyond their flower beds. Lining porches and walkways with flowers in containers can expand your range of colors and create a great first impression.

### **Accessorize**

Well-placed home furnishings and home accents can give your living spaces a rich and warm ambience, while creating the final look of your room design. Pots, urns and benches make a statement and have a unique ability to transform a room, deck or patio area. Create beautiful container gardens with gorgeous planters that add color and romance to your outdoor entertaining area.

These elements can establish style, from Tuscan to contemporary. Pots with rosemary and lavender, or even an empty olive jar, can create a Tuscan feel. In the backyard, they can help develop the outdoor room space by setting a boundary between individual outdoor spaces that can actual rooms for entertaining, lounging or intimate conversation.

A bench in the front says "welcome," and enhances curb appeal. A teak or cast-iron bench artfully placed to define a special area or provide a resting spot from which to view a coveted landscape is a strategic way to create value.

New outdoor furniture selections are deep, cushy and inviting and are designed for the ultimate in comfortable relaxation. Along with stylish seating groups, you can complete the look and ambience of your outdoor space with special throws, lamps, and outdoor rugs, which are now made to be comparable to indoor area rugs.

*Dave Tibbetts is the owner of Atlanta Decking & Fence Co., Cumming, GA  
([www.atlantadecking.com](http://www.atlantadecking.com)).*