

Hardscaping Trends

Create an Outdoor Oasis

By Charlene Pierce

Maximizing outdoor spaces is more than a trend; it is a new way of living. Outdoor spaces are becoming an extension of the home, expanding living space and creating an inviting environment to entertain guests. Hardscaping refers to the structural parts of outdoor renovation, like retaining walls, decks, walkways, and the like. Investing in comfortable outdoor furniture, landscaping, and accessories makes these outdoor areas comfortable and attractive.

Creating an outdoor living space is worth the investment because hardscaping increases the value of your home. Adding paved decks, stone patios, or outdoor fireplaces can transform a drab outdoor area into an inviting and luxurious living space. When you add or increase deck and patio space (so long as it's done properly by an expert), you could recoup as much as 65 percent of your investment. That is a good incentive for creating a space in your home that you can enjoy.

Of all the outdoor improvements, adding an outdoor kitchen provides the highest return on investment, sometimes as much as 200 percent. Outdoor kitchens are all the rage right now. A Forbes poll revealed that 65 percent of homeowners cite an outdoor kitchen as the top priority when remodeling their outdoor space. An outdoor kitchen can be as simple as a built-in grill with dedicated seating space, or it could include a pizza oven and bar with shades and enclosures.

A wonderful solution for those who crave an outdoor kitchen but don't have the space for it is to merge the kitchen with the backyard. Folding glass doors and enclosed verandas provide a seamless transition between the home and yard, making both spaces feel larger. The open concept takes full advantage of natural light. It is bright and airy, with easy flow between the indoor and outdoor areas. Using similar materials and colors for the patio and indoor spaces further blends the two, creating one large space.

Another trend for cooking outdoors is the brick pizza oven. You can create delicious wood-fired pizzas, ribs, roasted vegetables, and more. The brick oven is an attractive addition to outdoor spaces and can be made in any shape or size you wish. When you add seating around it, you create a private, inviting, and stylish outdoor area to enjoy.

Privacy for your outdoor sanctuary can be achieved by adding lush greenery or bright blooms as vertical plantings. Pergolas, trellises, and even hanging baskets and mounted containers can create a green wall. When incorporated properly, they create a natural privacy screen that makes the space

feel lush instead of closed in. You can integrate water collection features for a sustainable design that is easy to maintain.

If you have an area in your yard that feels neglected, try adding a bench and a canopy for shade and then create a hardscaped pathway that leads to it. A natural stone pathway unifies your yard while adding a rustic touch and creating an inviting entrance to the area. It is a great trick for making every corner of your yard usable.

We often think of retaining walls as necessary additions because they increase the stability of sloped areas. They do increase stability, but they can also create more usable yard space while adding beauty. You can create a lovely, functional space by combining hardscaping with natural elements like shrubs, plants, and grass.

A multi-level retaining wall can include flower beds and water features. Short retaining walls can create space around a firepit, for example, while also providing seating. If seating is what you crave in your yard, consider installing a concrete seat the length of the wall. You can make it cozy with plush couch cushions and pillows. With the help of an experienced contractor, you can create a unique and luxurious outdoor area for your home.

The key to adding hardscaping to your yard is to make sure it blends with the architecture of your home. A contemporary home might benefit from sleek concrete and smooth stone steps, while a home with cottage features such as half-timber and shutters can incorporate natural stone features. Utilizing different materials and textures can create a cohesive look while drawing attention to different elements of your yard. An experienced contractor can help to create a unified look that will add value to your home.

For the perfect final touch to any hardscape design, add lighting. You can create a magical effect with the right lighting and transform your outdoor area into a nighttime oasis. Pathway and deck lights, low-voltage lights, and string lights provide a warm, inviting atmosphere. Hardscaping and lighting are a great combination for creating an outdoor living space that is functional and inviting. **WE**

Sources for this article included: bobvila.com, hgto.com, realtor.com, and forbes.com.

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