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Features & Arts

If we learned one thing in lockdown, it was how much we should cherish our outdoor space. Over the past six months, gardens have been transformed into somewhere to eat, drink, socialise – and even work.

And while that is all well and good in the spring and summer, spending time outdoors in autumn brings its own challenges – not least the unpredictable weather.

But faced with further restrictions on our social lives, the boom for outdoor living looks set to extend well into the colder months.

With a bit of weatherproofing, however, you too can enjoy an al fresco autumn.

“Outdoor rooms – spaces designed to act and feel like an extension of the living space – were the feature most requested by clients this summer,” says garden designer Lottie Delamain (lottiedelamain.com).

“And there’s no sign of it letting up. At this rate, I think we’ll be enjoying outdoor living well into the winter, too.”

Not only is ventilation key to reducing the risk of spreading coronavirus, experts have long extolled the benefits of the life al fresco on both our mental and physical health.

Norwegians even have a word for it: *friluftsliv*, or “open-air living”.

So is your home – and, in particular, your garden – ready for an al fresco autumn? Here’s how to get it shipshape.

1. Heat things up

Nothing says a Scandinavian winter quite like huddling around an open fire. According to the John Lewis Flexible Living report, sales of outdoor heaters have risen by an astonishing 331 per cent this year, while sales of fire pits are up by 140 per cent.

“We saw an increase in sales throughout the year, but as of September, everything has gone crazy,” says Steve Levy, managing director of Heat Outdoors (heat-outdoors.co.uk). “More people are starting to view their gardens as rooms, and finding ways to keep warm is a big part of that.”

There are many different styles of outdoor heater to choose from. In recent weeks, Levy has seen a big push for flame heaters, with the Santini model proving one of the most popular.

“It has a large flame inside a glass tube, and gives out a reasonable amount of heat, which is what people are looking for as we go into winter,” he added. At the top end is the Empire heater, which, to be eco-friendly, turns itself off when no one is around.

To create more of a “garden room” feel, go for an outdoor fireplace with a chimney, the kind made popular by Hampshire hotel The Pig.

“They help create a focal point for the garden and ramp up that outdoor room feel,” says Delamain.

“You can really go to town, by dressing the mantelpiece as you would indoors, and creating a lovely relaxed area around the hearth with rugs.”

Urban Fires (urbanfires.co.uk) offers contemporary-style wall fires that fit into a range of spaces, or for a more traditional-style fire pit try Black Country Metal Works (blackcountrymetalworks.co.uk).

2. Weatherproof your outdoor furniture

No one wants to be hauling their chairs indoors at the first sight of rain. Moda Furnishings (modafurnishings.co.uk) offer a range of all-weather furniture, created using a UV-treated fabric, which allows it to be left outside all year around; their corner sofa comes with two coffee tables, and is perfect

for sitting people around at a social distance.

For smaller spaces, Chelsea-based interior designer Juliette Byrne (juliettebyrne.com) is a fan of ski chalet-style banquette seating. “When done for the night, all you need do is take the cushions off and store them inside the banquette. When paired with a trestle table, you’ve got a lovely outdoor dining area,” she says.

3. Make it cosy

Our Scandinavian neighbours are expert at spending time outdoors in the cold winter months, so it’s only right that we should turn to them for some al fresco inspiration.

Sheepskin rugs, such as those by Nordic Sheepskin (nordicsheepskin.com), are perfect for draping over garden chairs and sofas to keep guests cosy.

Byrne is a fan of outdoor rugs, that can bring a “snug, sitting-room feel” to an outside space.

If you want to do your bit for the planet, Meridiani (meridiani.it) have beautiful rugs made out of recycled glass that can live outside all year round.

4. Add some ambience

Given the rule of six and a 10pm pub curfew for the next six months, we’re going to be spending a lot of evenings drinking and dining outside. Delamain suggests that outdoor lighting is a good way to inject warmth into a space, and bring the atmosphere of a bar to

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your garden. “Festoon lighting is absolutely gorgeous, helping create that warm, cosy glow,” she says.

Head to John Lewis (johnlewis.com) or Cox & Cox (coxandcox.co.uk), which both have extensive selections of festoon lights that can be used indoors and outdoors.

Alternatively, dot lanterns around your patio, such as those from Nordic House (nordichouse.co.uk).

5. Admire some outdoor art

Outdoor cinemas have had a good pandemic – but the chance to huddle in front of a fabric projector screen for the best part of two hours might not be so desirable in the depths of winter (still, try the QKK Projector 4500 Lumen Video Projector if you do).

But what about putting up some outdoor art in your garden?

Yard Art UK (yardartuk.co.uk) has a range of contemporary artworks that is sure to add a splash of colour to a rain-washed patio.

6. Try an outdoor kitchen

If there’s one thing that will encourage people outdoors in autumn, it’s the promise of a flame-cooked meal.

Fire Magic (fire-magic.co.uk) sells double-walled stainless-steel barbecues for all-round weather durability.

Meanwhile, sales of pizza ovens at John Lewis are up 229 per cent.

For one with a cutting-edge look, try the Ooni Pro (thepizzaovenshop.com), which has a quad-fuelled capability, meaning you can cook with pellets, gas, wood or charcoal. Alternatively, try Mobi Ovens (mobi-pizza-ovens.co.uk) for something made-to-measure with a more traditional stone look.



How to cosy-up your outside space for autumn

As the Government recommends socialising outside wherever possible, *Alice Hall* discovers ways to ready your garden for cooler, Covid-free nights

TOP TEN OUTSIDE LIVING BUYS

Ceramic cutout large lantern candle holder £59, West Elm (johnlewis.com)



Edric Handwoven Multi-coloured wool and silk throw £100, Habitat (habitat.co.uk)



Rustic turquoise mug £6, Elzora (habitat.co.uk)



Morri T-Light small in Gold £6.95 (nkuku.com)



Balboa Woven Outdoor Pendant Light £308, Maison Dumonde (maisonsdumonde.com)



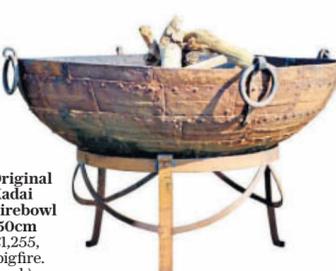
Rusty Outdoor Woodburner £425 (coxandcox.co.uk)



Outdoor rug £32.95 (benuta.co.uk)



Muji ceramic indoor/outdoor stool £128, Anthropologie (anthropologie.com)



Original Kadai Firebowl 150cm £1,255, (bigfire.co.uk)



Nebula Mars Outdoor Projector £599, Nebula (currys.co.uk)