



Home & Garden Projects

Tips to Create a Great Outdoor Space

When the weather turns nice, it's time to take advantage of your outdoor space and create a welcoming outdoor living area. Whether you are a do-it-yourself homeowner or a homeowner working with a contractor, there are a variety of home and garden projects that can make your outdoor space great.

As the outdoor building experts, we've put together this guide for homeowners looking to make their outdoor space welcoming, beautiful, and comfortable. In this guide, we'll take a look at what to consider when starting outdoor projects, the most popular projects, the types of lumber and composites to use for projects, and tips for starting your garden – even if you don't have a large yard.

Starting an Outdoor Project: What to Consider

Deciding you'll use wood for your project is like saying you're going to get a "dog" as a pet. When you're choosing a dog, there are a lot of breed options and some breeds are better suited for certain situations. For instance, if you live in a studio apartment, a Great Dane probably isn't for you.

Wood is no different. Each building project is unique and choosing the right lumber for the job is an important step in the building process. Some woods are better fits for certain projects. And of course, personal taste comes into play as well. You could just use "standard" wood, it's readily available from any big box lumber outlet – and generally at a cheap price. But like most everything in life, you get what you pay for. Quality wood makes for quality construction.



Popular Projects to Create Outdoor Spaces

There are virtually endless projects for your home that you can build with wood, from end tables to treehouses. Here are three popular projects for homeowners looking to make their outdoor areas great – and the best types of wood for each project.

Build a Deck

A deck is the outdoor room of your home. You'll spend as much time on it as the sun and weather allow. A great deck can be a point of pride for your home. It can be the grand stage on which to entertain guests and the quiet place to soak up some rays or enjoy an afternoon of reading a book. A deck is versatile and its materials should be as well.

The Right Lumber for Decking

The understructure of any deck should feature pressure-treated-lumber, which will help your deck withstand the elements, from weather to sun to insects. Without pressure-treated wood, your deck's understructure may become susceptible to decay and rot.

For the top of your deck – the part you'll be looking at and walking on – there are countless options. The best solution depends on your tolerance for maintenance, your preference for look and feel, and your budget. Softwoods (like Redwood and Cedar) are gorgeous woods that feel comfortable under your feet and are most affordable. Hardwoods (like Mangaris and IPE) combine beauty with stability, and can provide you with a deck that will last for many years to come. If you prefer a solution that requires little to no maintenance, investing in composite decking (like Trex, Fiberon and TimberTech) would be the way to go. It requires no sanding, staining or finishing.



Install Patio Covers & Awnings

Patio covers (or awnings) provide extra protection from the elements. Patio covers are an open canvas to create an artistic and functional structure for your home. They shade you from the beating sun and shelter you from falling rain. Your patio cover is the first line of defense from the elements – and it needs to be well-equipped.

The Right Lumber for Patio Covers

Choose materials that match your vision. “Rough” or “surfaced” lumber makes great patio covers. Generally, these are softwoods like Douglas Fir, Redwood, and Cedar. Another great option is Alumawood, which combines the beauty of wood with the durability of aluminum to create a durable solution with endless design options.



Fence It In

A good fence marks your domain and surrounds your little slice of America. A fence quite literally, puts your stake in the ground. You want a fence that looks great, works great and lasts.

The Right Lumber for Fences, Rails, and Posts

Fence rails and posts – like the understructure of decks – require pressure-treated lumber to ensure a long lifespan. Posts, since they will have contact with the ground, should be constructed from wood with a stronger treatment (a .40 retention level, measured in pounds of treatment per cubic foot). Metal posts are a great option as well.

For fence boards, there are a variety of options. Cedar, Redwood and Whitewood are most readily available. Each of these woods are easily stainable, which not only gives the wood a sleek look, but will help protect it from the elements. Vinyl fencing, available in various looks, is low maintenance and incredibly durable. Many brands include a lifetime warranty.



Tips to Start Your Garden

Whether you plan to grow fresh, organic vegetables to enjoy around the table or a bed of gorgeous flowers that add a sweet smell to the air, every garden starts from the ground up.

Options for Small Spaces

When it comes to building the perfect garden, you have a few different options. Perhaps you have plentiful ground space full of fertile soil that enjoys uninterrupted sun for most of the day. However, if you live anywhere where space is at a premium, that's probably not the case. But not to worry, there's a fantastic alternative to the traditional "in-ground" garden – the garden box. Also called a "raised garden bed," it provides versatility, reliability and much more.

They're easy. A garden box makes gardening simple. They're easier to plant in, easier to water and easier to harvest than traditional gardens. They're a great option for older gardeners, those with back issues, or anyone who would rather not kneel on the hard ground when tending to crops.

They're weed-resistant. If flowers and vegetables grew as quickly and easily as weeds, gardening would be a cinch. Weeds can take over your garden before you know what's happening. Due to height and strong wooden walls, garden boxes block pathway weeds and are less susceptible to invasion.

They're soil-friendly. Garden boxes sustain the quality of your soil by preventing it from being mixed with poor quality soil or compacting, as it would in the ground. Garden boxes also prevent soil from being washed away or contaminated during periods of heavy rain.

You'll enjoy higher yields – in smaller spaces. Every gardener wants high quality, plentiful yields. Garden boxes provide bigger, better yields in small spaces, when compared to traditional garden rows. Bottom line: if you have limited space, a garden box will give help you achieve a plentiful yield in a small space.



Build a Garden Box

Are you ready to start gardening above ground? Good! The next step is building your garden box. There are a few options when it comes to outdoor building materials for your garden.

Option A: If you're not keen on saws and drills, you can purchase an easy-to-assemble garden box kit.

Option B: Or you can do it the traditional way – build it yourself. All you need is a few simple tools (a saw, a drill and some screws to start) – and the right type of wood.

Choosing your outdoor building materials is the most important decision you'll make when building a garden box. You'll need materials that are:

- Durable and dense and can brave the elements
- Clean and natural to ensure your garden is chemical free

Best Lumber Options for a Garden Box

Redwood is the most popular wood for garden boxes – and for good reason. It's popular because it's:

- Durable
- Natural
- Resistant to warping, rot and termites
- Gorgeous
- Long-lasting
- Easily and inexpensively restored

Cedar is another great option for garden boxes – or any other outdoor building project. Similar to Redwood, Cedar is:

- Durable
- Light – meaning you won't have to drag heavy boards around
- Resistant to bugs and decay
- Available in different varieties, like Western Red and Alaskan Yellow

Warning: Never use pressure-treated lumber for garden boxes. While it is sturdy and rot-resistant, it contains chemicals that can seep into your soil and ruin your crops. In fact, any lumber that has been treated with chemicals should never be used. This includes stains. Staining your garden box can create a gorgeous look, but don't stain on the soil-facing side of the box. Clean soil = clean crops. Never sacrifice looks for quality!



Now that you've got the basics behind creating a comfortable outdoor space, it's time to get to work! Maximize your outdoor area and create an outdoor space your family, friends, and neighbors will enjoy for years. Not sure where to start? Contact your local J&W Lumber store for a quote, a 3D model of your project, to check out an in-store display, or to speak with one of our outdoor building experts about your project.

Contact J&W Lumber Today!

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