



Bringing the

Inside Out

Garden centers can help homeowners transform their backyards to be relaxing extensions of their interior living spaces.

By Teresa McPherson

People want their backyards to be relaxing extensions of their interior living spaces. So it's no surprise that one movement that continues to gain ground is creating outdoor spaces that look like the extension of indoors. Here are a few notable trends in outdoor living.

Bring it Outdoors

The interest in outdoor furniture has been steadily increasing for some time now, says Mark Rosas, senior sales

manager at Alfresco Home. "However, it did certainly increase more dramatically during the pandemic. As people were told that they could not leave their homes to go to work, to go on vacation or even go out to dinner, they found themselves spending more time outdoors to find some way to get out of the house. In many cases, they may not have had any outdoor furniture, or they did but now they could use the vacation money they had saved up to upgrade the outdoor furniture they had.

"As they beautified their spaces, neighbors took notice and also wanted to experience the same type of outdoor living space in their homes so because of that, the trend continues to grow even today," he says.

Manufacturers have responded — and benefitted from this — by creating stylish and durable outdoor sofas, tables, chairs, rugs and decor. Add an outdoor fireplace, maybe a TV, and the line between indoors and out all but disappears.

“We are definitely seeing increased sales in all our outdoor furniture, both dining and deep seating collections,” Rosas says. “The particular style varies from traditional to more transitional looks depending on the region where the customer lives, but all styles are seeing an increase.”

Screen It out with Native Plants

Home design web site Houzz reports that, as homeowners increasingly expand their available living space to the outdoors, many are installing screens, fences, plantings and other materials to block an

undesirable view, create privacy, or even act as a natural sound barrier, especially in urban areas.

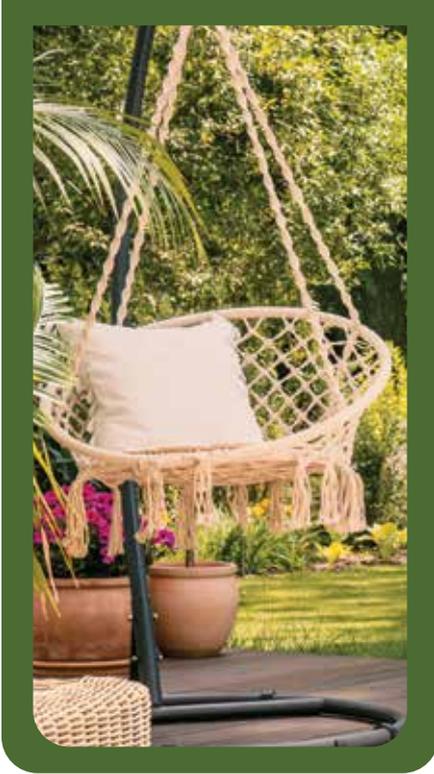
Garden centers should suggest native plants to create privacy screens, says the University of Maryland Extension office. Native plants are adapted to local soils and climate conditions and generally require less fertilizing and watering once established.

Mark Andrews, brand manager at Greenleaf Nursery Co., agrees. “Some of the most versatile plants for landscaping are native to North America,” he says. “These plants have already shown that they can grow and thrive under the varying conditions within their native range, and wildlife and pollinators know the plants for their shelter, flowering, and fruit.

“Some native plants that work well as evergreen screens are selections of Bush Honeysuckle, Junipers, Hollies, Inkberries, Sweetspire, Sage and Viburnum.



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“Even native grasses, such as Feather Reed Grass and Switch Grass can make great screens, as they retain their beauty through the winter, before requiring cutback in spring,” Andrews says.

Attract Birds and Wildlife

For generations, homeowners have had a desire to attract more wildlife by way of bird houses, feeders, baths, etc., as well as pollinator-friendly flowers and shrubs. Adding native plants and trees helps support wildlife as well.

“Songbirds, butterflies and other types of wildlife rely on native plants for food and habitat,” according to the Maryland Extension office. “Populations of birds, insects and other beneficial wildlife are in decline due to habitat loss. [Plant] choices matter and can support animals that provide pollination, pest control, and natural beauty.”

Fancy Up the Floor

Patterned floor tile can change the entire look of a kitchen or laundry room — and now homeowners are taking this trend outdoors. Whether to create a stylish surface for the patio or to continue the look of the indoor space outdoors (remember, bringing

the indoors out) tile provides a durable and waterproof flooring.

A recent study from The Freedonia Group says “the growing popularity of outdoor living ... is driving consumer interest in materials that can unify indoor-outdoor aesthetics for a seamless transition between spaces. (Think stone patio pavers that match the flooring in an adjoining interior room, or using the same stone tiling in the backsplashes of both indoor and outdoor kitchens.)”

The Freedonia study “Hardscaping Products” predicts rock and stone will continue to benefit from the outdoor living trend of adding hardscaped areas with higher-value finishes that bring indoors aesthetics outside. Natural stone is especially popular in upscale outdoor living hardscape installations, where cost is less of a factor; rock and stone can be used as both pavers and outdoor kitchen flooring. It is also used as veneer in outdoor kitchen facades, retaining walls, and fire pits and fireplaces. 🌿

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