

## Exteriors

# What do you mean, you don't have an outdoor bathroom?

Alfresco baths and showers are the new must-have. Here's how to create one in your garden (without scaring the neighbours). By Madeleine Howell

Hot tubs, which used to be a bit of a rarity, have become commonplace of late, with more than 100,000 households in the UK now in possession of one, according to recent research. However, there is a new trend in town, with increasing numbers of people opting instead for a more traditional bath and shower set-up outdoors. This move is partly inspired, like many interiors trends before it, by the Soho Farmhouse members' club in Oxfordshire, which has normalised the idea of alfresco bathing, with tin baths on secluded decking (obligatory Cowshed bubble bath to hand, not to mention a glass of fizz). "We always used to look forward to the outdoor baths at Soho Farmhouse when we visited," says interiors consultant Jolene Marshall, who recently added an outdoor bathroom and shower to her Norfolk holiday cottage.

And now the trend is spreading to the real world, with more than 44,000 posts – and counting – on Instagram with the hashtag #outdoorbath.

An alfresco bath or shower is nothing new in countries where the weather is warmer, but Brits are increasingly prepared to brave our unpredictable climate. "Many people have reconnected with the great outdoors, and are seeking to make more of their outside spaces," explains James Smith, director of innovation at Victoria + Albert Baths. "A steaming bath under the stars is a truly restorative experience, and we're increasingly seeing freestanding baths specified for outdoor bathrooms. There are multiple physical and mental-health

benefits to bathing outside, from relaxation and relieving muscle pain to promoting sleep."

One study has shown that spending 30 minutes in nature each week could reduce the risk of depression and high blood pressure by up to seven per cent and nine per cent, respectively.

If garden bars and outdoor kitchens have so far defined the ever-growing fashion for making your garden an extension of your interior (with searches for "outdoor living" up 53 per cent on Pinterest), then the proliferating trend for outdoor bathrooms is one to watch this summer.

"The reinterpretation of the outdoors as a living space, complete with day beds, has extended to countries with milder climates, such as the UK," says Anke Sohn of bathroom design specialists AXOR, which is soon launching a new outdoor shower design suited to either the garden or "the urban terrace" in a variety of finishes (prices from £3,370; axor-design.com).

The good news is that, while it is entirely possible to spend an inordinate sum on an outdoor bath, it's also easy to do on a tight budget, even in a small space. "I bought mine for just £25 from Gumtree, attached the kitchen sink tap to a garden hose and threaded it down the garden to the bath," says Anna Murray, 39, who lives in Bruton and runs design studio Patterly. "My outdoor bath is my happy place. I run my own creative business, and it's how I switch off."

Read on for more outdoor bathroom inspiration...



## It's an extra special way to enjoy the garden

Interiors consultant Jolene Marshall, 43, and her husband Jason, 47, added a garden bathroom to their holiday cottage in Norfolk, featuring reclaimed timber, brass lighting and a free-standing tin tub

✱ We wanted to create an extra special way to enjoy the garden. Aesthetically, I think an outdoor bathroom looks better than a hot tub. One of the other reasons was to avoid the need for maintenance and the use of chemicals. I prefer fresh running water, and find it's a nicer experience. We've kept the material palette quite simple, with four key materials: tin, wood, stone and linen. The cottage used to be part of the Sandringham Estate and we wanted to stay true to the heritage of it, so we used lots of reclaimed wood salvaged from old sheds in the garden.

The tin on the roof, found in the garden as well, complements the beautiful tin bath from Indigenous (prices from £2,880; indigenous.co.uk), and there's also a copper outdoor shower.

My husband Jason is super practical and hands-on and can build anything, while I have quite exacting standards about how things should look, and how they should feel.

The brass lamps and lighting in the cabin create a lovely warm, soft glow, especially combined with candles. With

the scent of the pine tree outside, it's very calming, and a way to slow down and retreat from the world – all you can hear are birds and rustling trees.

The plumbing cost around £3,000, and our overall budget for the entire space (including construction and materials) was around £15,000, although it would have been more if Jason hadn't done a lot of the build himself. When we bought the property in 2020, it had been unmodernised for decades. We spent a year renovating it.

I would say that you have to think carefully about positioning in terms of privacy to ensure you're not overlooked. It's also important to think about the logistics of plumbing hot and cold running water – an easier and cheaper way to do it is to put it in an external wall where there's already plumbing, perhaps in a kitchen or an existing cold bathroom.

Once the plumbing is sorted, think about "touch points" – like where you'll set a drink or your book down, where you'll get changed and how you'll keep the towels off the floor. [theworkerscottage.co.uk](http://theworkerscottage.co.uk)

► Using only natural materials, including wood from old sheds, Jolene Marshall right has created an outdoor bathroom in keeping with its surroundings





# FOUR OF THE BEST ESCAPIST STAYS WITH OUTDOOR BATHS



**HUTS IN THE HILLS, NORTHUMBERLAND**  
The huge outdoor bath in the fresh air is the trump card of the Maylies shepherd's hut in the Northumberland National Park. *Sleeps five. Prices from £420 for two nights; hutsinthehills.co.uk*



**ELMLEY NATURE RESERVE, KENT**  
Elmley's rustic accommodation features outdoor vintage bathtubs and epic views of marshland and sunrises, amid 3,300 acres of wild landscape. *Doubles from £225; elmleynaturereserve.co.uk*



**THE OLD PIGGERY AT WINDOUT FARM, DEVON**  
Outdoor twin roll-top baths await outside this open-plan cottage on an 11th-century farm at the edge of Dartmoor National Park. *Sleeps two with extra space for two children; from £125 per night via canopyandstars.co.uk; windoutbarn.co.uk*



**THE NEST GLAMPING, LINCOLNSHIRE**  
The freestanding, egg-shaped outdoor baths outside the luxury safari tent lodges at The Nest Glamping overlook the lake (open-water swimming optional). *Prices from £180 per night; thenestglamping.co.uk*



KAT WEATHERILL



## Great gardens engage the senses

Designer Ellie Edkins, 29, incorporated a copper shower into her Hot Tin Roof urban garden in the Container Gardens category at the Chelsea Flower Show last September

✱ The Hot Tin Roof garden was inspired by a life lived by the beach, but designed for an urban area. I love the feeling of washing the sand off your feet at the end of a lovely long day at the beach. The corrugated wall covering and planters were inspired by an old-fashioned garden shed. This garden was about playing with nostalgia but also creating a contemporary space.

The copper shower was from a local maker I found on Etsy, I wanted it to have a reclaimed look. For me, it feels more authentic than one of those flashy rain showers.

Outdoor bathrooms are possible even in small urban spaces and you can be really creative with it. Drainage is a key consideration, but by using gravel in the splash zone and strategically laying the fabulous graphic blue tiles, I could mitigate excess water run-off. Great garden design should engage the senses and connect you to nature.

An outdoor shower offers added functionality and an invigorating experience to the space. Given the growing interest in cold water therapy, popularised by Wim ("The Iceman") Hof, outdoor showers don't necessarily even need hot water plumbed in to offer many wellbeing benefits.

*ellie-edkins.co.uk*

✱ 'It's a retreat,' says Jolene Marshall of the bathroom in the garden of her Norfolk holiday home

✱ Ellie Edkins's Hot Tin Roof garden, with shower, was designed for Chelsea Flower Show



## Practicalities to consider

By James Smith, director of innovation at Victoria + Albert Baths

Think about your choice of materials. Anything outside will be exposed to the elements all year round

Placement will need careful planning. A secluded and sheltered location, where the bather has privacy, is ideal

Crucially, an outdoor bathroom should be close enough to the main property to minimise plumbing complications

Finally, choose a comfortable bath. An outside bath is likely to be a regular treat rather than a daily event, so you'll want to indulge in a long soak when you do use it. Sit (and lie) in the bath before you buy it. Different people find different shapes comfortable

The final touch is a bath rack, which will hold your wine glass while you lay back and gaze at the cosmos

## If you haven't got the money for a swimming pool, get an outdoor bath!

Molly Gunn, 44, is the founder of ethical fashion brand Selfish Mother. She lives in Bruton, Somerset, with her husband Tom, 45, and their children Rafferty, 11, Fox, nine, and Liberty, five

✱ Our home is an old chapel and has very little outdoor space. It's like a London garden, even though it's in the countryside.

I've always dreamed of having a swimming pool – but I was reluctant to go down the hot tub route.

Instead, I found a secondhand bath on eBay for £100. It's the best £100 I've ever spent. We put it on wooden decking next to the kitchen's external wall, so the plumbing wasn't expensive – around £200. I can't explain how great it is. I think everybody should have an outdoor bath.

The sun hits the garden from midday until six o'clock, so in the afternoons at weekends I'll sit in the bath in swimwear for a couple of hours with music playing and top it up with hot water. It's like a warm pool. My kids enjoy the novelty of it, and when we have parties we use it as a giant ice bucket.

There's something magical and soulful about lying in a bath outside. It's a good way to switch off, away from screens. I've got a gorgeous bath inside too, but I don't go in it as much.

I love being submerged in water, so

I'd say to anyone who hasn't got the space or the money for a swimming pool to get an outdoor bath.

You can fit a bath into even very small gardens, and you don't even need to have it plumbed in – you can fit a pipe to your tap and weave it through the window, and use the leftover bathwater for your plants. To style it up and bring the inside out, I've got a colourful bath mat from Peachy Parrot (peachyparrot.com). The bath is eccentric and fun, and it's not a big commitment – you can easily sell it if you get bored.

*selfishmother.com*



✱ As good as a pool: Molly Gunn and her daughter Liberty enjoy an outdoor dip

