

Bring the elegance of your living room fireplace to your backyard with the Montana Wood Fireplace with Outdoor Fireplace Surround from Heat & Glo. The Montana is built to take anything Mother Nature can dish out and can easily be transferred to a gas burning unit. Available locally at the Fireplace Center.



Heat up the Night

Extend the summer season on both ends by finding a patio fireplace that fits your space and your style.



AS PATIOS BECOME LIVING SPACES, HEATING OPTIONS BECOME

a vital component of these areas, and fireplace manufacturers are stepping up to the challenge. The backyard fire “pit” has evolved over the years, and finding the right unit for your patio is important to keeping cozy during those cool summer nights.

Really heating up

If the purpose of your patio is to serve as an extension to your living room without the campfire feel, check out a custom-built fireplace to evoke the same welcoming setting as an indoor version. These are ideal for large patios or yards, and offer space to spread out in front of the fireplace opening.

Restaurants aren’t the only ones sporting gas fire pits whose round or square set-up encourage late night gathering. With a myriad of customization options, creating the façade to match the material that covers the gas outlet is easy. “A lot of people are choosing colored, tempered glass to cover the gas outlet,” said Trever Craig, president of The Fireplace Center in Billings. “Other options are lava rock, stones or fake logs.”

Custom fireplaces or pits can run anywhere from \$1,000 and up depending on the materials used for construction. Smaller, ready-to-assemble versions can be found online or at local stores such as The Fireplace Center or Billings Hardware.

Just cozy enough

Smaller yards don’t have to miss out on evening coziness. Portable options with bases made of copper, cast iron or steel create the same ambience and take up less space. These versions also provide more versatility for the user. “Smaller fire pits can be used with wood or charcoal,” said Craig. “They also typically come with a grate that can be used for grilling.”

Another alternative for a rustic feel are chimneas. The original chimnea is a Mexican-style clay stove designed to vent smoke up instead of out at lower levels. While the clay models are still popular, many people are opting for cast-iron versions because they tend to last longer. The advantage of either style is that they require little to no assembly.

Fueling the fire: Gas vs. Wood

An age-old argument among backyard grillers has become common between patio fireplace gurus as well: What fuel is best for my flame? And of course it always comes down to personal preference. TJ Comstock, owner of Billings Hardware, suggests keeping a few things in mind when deciding. “Gas is more convenient to start. Just turn a knob, flick a switch or even use a remote control,” he said. “Gas also burns cleaner and doesn’t throw smoke in your face every time the wind changes. However, you do have to make sure you have a propane tank on hand when you want to use your fireplace.”

On the flip side, fire pits that use wood or charcoal tend to be



TOP: The Fogata Grande fire pit, by Quadra-Fire, is excellent for home owners who want to turn an existing outdoor patio area into a fun, warm gathering place. An optional gas log kit is available. The Fogata Grande is distributed locally by the Fireplace Center. MIDDLE: Artic Products offers this Chiminea-Pagoda style fire-pit that can double as a wood or charcoal grill. Available locally at Billings Hardware. BOTTOM: The Patio Campfire collection from Heat & Glo lets you enjoy the ease of clean burning gas with the feel of a traditional campfire. Homeowners can choose from a variety of materials and configurations to surround the unit. Available locally at the Fireplace Center.

less expensive unless you're going for a full-on fireplace. Wood also satisfies the desire for that calming, crackling sound of warmth on a cool night.

However you decide to set up your patio fire focal point, make sure that it blends with the style of your house and landscape and has enough surrounding seating for friends to enjoy the warmth. ■



Safety Tips

As with any open flame, safety is an essential part of enjoying an outdoor fireplace. Keep these things in mind when setting up your space:

- Check with the city or county on any current fire restrictions if you're planning on using wood.
- Be aware of the surface where your pit is placed. If a deck is the ideal location for a smaller fire pit, invest in a barbecue mat to place underneath the base.
- Keep fire pits away from overhanging trees and plants. Also make sure plastic chairs are kept a safe distance from metal and flames.
- If children, pets or unruly adults are near the flame, invest in a screen to cover the top of the fire pit.

LEFT: The Moose Fire Ring from World Factory is a perfect blend of modern convenience and rustic charm. Available at Billings Hardware.

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