

# Outdoor Kitchen: Taking the Inside Out

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Outdoor kitchens have been rapidly gaining in popularity, which should come as no surprise. Seems like it gets harder to gather the family around the dinner table at night, but when you're talking about a barbecue, the "whole fam damily" likes to show up! Even if you think an outdoor kitchen is too far from your budget, you may be surprised at just how affordable it can be. The key is really in the basics. If you have an existing patio or deck, you're over halfway there. All it really takes to have an outdoor kitchen is a grill and a storage area for the cooking accessories you need. Many manufacturers provide that in a single unit for as low as \$299. Of course, there are many options to consider, if you have a larger budget, which are some of the things I'll mention here.

## Location, Location, Location

Again, if you already have an area, such as a concrete patio or deck, the cost is minimal to set up a nice outdoor kitchen. A word of caution, though, if you are setting up on an existing deck. Be sure to have a professional look at the structural soundness of the deck before adding the extra weight of a large outdoor kitchen. You may need to add some extra bracing first.

The important thing to keep in mind is that wherever you have the grilling station, you want to make sure there are no combustible surfaces next to the grill. Fire plus wood equals more fire! But don't consider only wood surfaces. Don't make the mistake I've seen more times than I can remember of placing your grill next to an area covered in vinyl siding. A hot grill may not start a fire there, but it will literally melt the siding, then you have a huge mess and will be spending a lot more money to remove and replace siding.

If you are opting for a gas grill, you'll want to locate your kitchen near a gas line, or where one can be easily installed. Also, you'll want to provide ample cover for the cook in the event of bad weather and proper outdoor lighting.

## Build-It-Yourself



If you create your own type of cabinets for storage, you want to be sure and consider how much they will be affected by the elements. I have built many small outdoor kitchen areas using treated lumber. You can also sheathe the area with a cement fiber backer board and install a tile or stone surface over it. A very nice stainless steel drop-in grill can be purchased for around \$700, like this Charmglow available at [The Home Depot](#). The countertop also needs to be weatherproof. Granite, tile, solid surface, stainless steel and even concrete can be used successfully. If you make the countertop area large enough for the eating area, too, then you create a fantastic social spot all centered around the grill. Barstools complete the look, but, again, keep the weather in mind when choosing the stools.

## Sinks and Refrigerators



What is a kitchen without a refrigerator? New models have been designed strictly for outdoor use. In almost every instance, you want a good stainless steel model. These refrigerators aren't going to be the full size units, but rather an under the counter style. Make sure the unit you choose is rated for outdoor use. Having a refrigerator outside will save countless of trips back and forth from the grill to the inside kitchen. For security, most of these models come with a lock, so you can keep items safely stored year-round.

A sink is another option well-worth considering. Simple things like rinsing food, adding water to sauces and even washing hands can be so convenient when a sink is right there instead of having to go onside or use a water hose. However, you want to make sure and check out what your local building codes are in relation to adding a sink.

## Ready-To-Grill Modules



If you aren't comfortable with building your own outdoor kitchen, there are some great alternatives in modular units that you simply put in place and fire up the grill. Grills, by nature,

are meant for outdoor use, but you don't want to buy the \$39 special at the local five and dime. This is a true investment. Most grills will have a cooking area anywhere from 15 to 26 inches deep and up to four feet wide. The decision that first comes up with grills, though, is whether or not to have a charcoal grill or one that operates on gas (natural or LP). You could even opt for a wood smoker, although they are more difficult to provide a regimented cooking schedule.

Stainless steel is the most popular choice among true outdoor grilling connoisseurs. Some of the newer models are even coming out with bright colors and even a wood grain embossed on the stainless steel. You can also add options, such as a side burner to use for sauces or other dishes.

Of course, you can be just as elaborate as you can be simple. Here is a nice set-up from [Sam's Club](#).

This barbecue grill features three main burners, one infrared burner, one side burner, motorized rotisserie, heavy-duty grill cover and removable icebox. Best of all is the price. Sam's Club delivers this model for \$799 and you can get it in a natural gas or LP model.

For the Cadillac or even Maserati of the line, check out the stainless steel modular units like these from [Viking](#). Because the units are modular, you can pick and choose the style of your outdoor kitchen to include everything from the grill to refrigeration to a refreshment center.



Finally, as a bonus, you're not only creating a spot for family and friends to gather and enjoy good food and company. I mentioned earlier that this is an investment. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) has determined that adding an outdoor kitchen will add value to your home, so you're getting a return on your investment if you ever decide to sell. In fact, the return on your dollar can be as much as 130%.