

Inside out

Eating in the garden in summer is a delight, but you need to create the right ambience with lighting, furniture and accessories. And as for the cooking, these days you can even magic the kitchen outside. Here are some great ways to bring the indoors into the great outdoors, whatever your budget

Bespoke garden kitchens

They've been big news in the US for years, but fully equipped, weatherproof outdoor kitchens are only a recent trend in the UK. Built to your own specifications and aimed at people who are serious about cooking, eating and entertaining outside (and who don't mind sticking a jumper on when it turns chilly) these are light years away from your average barbecue. Just imagine your entire indoor kitchen... outside.

They can have built-in grills (on which you can cook anything from a leg of lamb to a Christmas turkey), side burners, sinks, kitchen units and fridges. They come with a hefty price tag: units from outdoor kitchen specialists Fire Magic range from around £2,000 for a built-in grill and side burner to around £10,000 for the complete kitchen. Even so, they're fast growing in popularity. "Our order books are full, despite the recession," says Fire Magic's Simon Prince (for more information, visit fire-magic.co.uk).



Everything but the kitchen sink... oh no, there it is

KEEP YOUR HERBS TO HAND

Plant some of your favourite herbs in a wall-hung planter or small raised bed, and you'll always have a supply of fresh herbs handy for alfresco eating. Keep a pair of scissors to hand, so you can snip off a handful as you cook.



Some like it hot

For outdoor heating, burning garden rubbish and flame-grilling, you can't beat a brazier. This 56cm-high steel brazier (£40, amazon.co.uk) comes with a chrome grill for barbecuing.

Barbecues

Gone are the days when a kettle drum barbie was all you could find to buy (great though they are, of course). These days they come in all shapes, sizes and prices. But how to choose? You'll find some great tips on making many of the most important barbie-related decisions (gas or charcoal, hooded or open, etc) in Ross Dobson's Trade secrets feature on p42.

After running through your personal barbie must-have list of features, your choice will probably come down to

price. For a great all-round barbie (and one of the best-selling models in the world), we love the Weber Q220, which is big enough to cook food for the whole family and has folding work tables and tool holders, as well as a raised lid for larger roasts (from £206.99, wowbbq.co.uk). For a chance to win a top-of-the-range Weber Q300, check out Foodie file (p12). But you don't have to spend a fortune – these bright, funky, budget barbecue buckets from Morrisons are just £7 each.



UTENSILS

Utensils with hooks are great when surface space is limited, as they can be hung on the barbecue. Mark your barbecue tongs with stickers or tags so you don't use the same one for raw and cooked meat.

Lighting

You know the feeling – the meat goes on the barbie at sunset, but by the time it's ready you can hardly decipher what's on your plate. Some nice lighting is essential to tell your chops from your kebabs, but too much and your garden will be more of a floodlit pitch than a magical grotto.

You'll need task lighting near tables and barbecues, plus ambient lighting to create a glow. For tips on permanent lighting, visit garden-lighting-design.co.uk.

Outdoor lighting doesn't have to be on a grand scale, though. Steer clear of trailing cables and go for solar powered solutions that can be left in the sun to charge and light up at dusk. We love these solar fairy lights (right) from The Solar Centre (£39.99

for a 10-metre, 100-light string, at thesolarcentre.co.uk), which can be strung through trees, along fences or... well, just about anywhere.

Meanwhile, candles protected from gusts of wind – such as this glass tea-light lantern in clear or green, from ASDA (£4, selected stores) will add nice ambient light.



The fairies take control of the delicious garden

Furniture

Sitting comfortably to enjoy your garden feasts is a must. If you're buying wooden furniture, be sure it has FSC accreditation. There's something for every garden – and every budget. For great value, we love this Chilton FSC four-piece set, from Morrisons (£150).



Barbie alternatives

If you're bored with the barbie, why not try something different? We love this stylish mosaic table (left) surrounding a fire with removable grill – hey presto, you can cook and keep your guests warm at the same time (Mosaic Round Barbecue Feature Table, £199 from marksandspencer.com).

Alternatively, dispense with the barbie and put a wood-burning pizza oven in the garden. You can also use it to bake bread, roast meat, or even to smoke various foods. Small, ready-made ovens are sold by gardengiftshop.co.uk and orchardovens.co.uk (which is where Jamie Oliver got his). Many people make their own; see clayoven.wordpress.com for a good example, or visit rivercottage.net for details of their 'Build and Bake' courses.

Shelter and extras

You can only trust the good old British climate to do one thing, but there are some great shelter options available. For serious alfresco cooks, the Gastro Garden Company offers bespoke structures (visit gastrogarden.co.uk for more details), while just-green.com sells this tough, waterproof gazebo, left, for just £99.15.



You never know when it's going to tip down