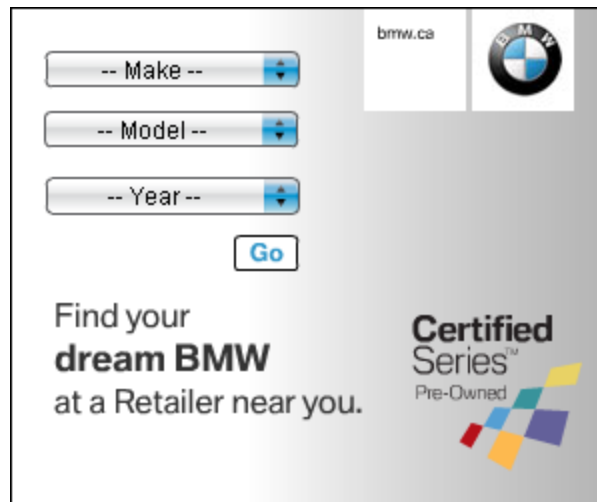


Creating a great outdoor space

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What does it take to set up an outdoor kitchen space? How about an outdoor dining space that can be used year around. The experts at Summerwood shared their thoughts with SheKnows.com.

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A screenshot of a BMW search interface. It features three dropdown menus labeled "-- Make --", "-- Model --", and "-- Year --", each with a blue arrow on the right. Below these is a blue "Go" button. In the top right corner, there is a "bmw.ca" label and the BMW logo. The bottom left of the interface contains the text "Find your dream BMW at a Retailer near you." and the bottom right features the "Certified Series™ Pre-Owned" logo with a colorful geometric design.

SheKnows: Do you have any tips for setting up an outdoor kitchen?

Summerwood: The biggest tip is to ask yourself what you would want in an indoor kitchen, replicate the list outside, and price it. Then, after you catch your breath over the high price, start peeling back the lesser priorities.

Popular kitchen essentials include: a) counter/work space, b) refrigeration c) grill/stove/oven d) sink e) storage space and f) lounging/dining area. Let s think of these outdoors.

A: Counter/work space

Be as generous as possible because no one in the history of entertaining has ever complained of too much counter space. Which leads neatly to the next point: smartly planned, counter space can double as a casual eating or snacking area. If elbowroom is at a premium, consider a grill you can cover and use during preparation hours.

B: Refrigeration

You ll need to wire your outdoor kitchen and install a durable unit if you intend to leave it outside. Many people can t afford this. A simple alternative is to use coolers. Or bins of ice are attractive and practical -- especially if you followed tip A and have loads of counter space. Keep your eyes peeled for old iceboxes from the early 20th century. They look great, insulate magnificently and will last well into the next ice age!

C: Cooker

Many people are happy with a decent grill. A well-maintained gas barbecue can do wonders, but the

debate still rages over its practicality versus that elemental cave-dweller's joy that comes with smoky charcoal. Still, many modern gas barbecues come with gas-powered hot plates on which you can boil your corn. Whichever you choose, place the grill closer to the edge of your structure, so smoke doesn't accumulate beneath the roof. Learn where the prevailing winds come from -- and whether they shift at certain times of the day. Build your cooking area downwind from where people socialize; nobody enjoys a face full of smoke. Better still, you can order easy-to-install vents while "inventing" your outdoor kitchen.

D: Sink

To plumb or not to plumb your outdoor kitchen is a big question. It raises the value of your home but takes a significant investment up front. What's more, you need to do it from the start. Retrofitting plumbing after you've laid flooring and built a structure can be very expensive.

Think about it: With a little meal planning, you could work around the minor inconvenience of not having a sink.

E: Storage space

A counter top/island makes a natural congregating area guests flock to. Build cupboards into these to store the more practical things like barbecuing tools, casual dishes and cleaners. (Fancier dishes and crystalware can be carried back and forth.) Build them sturdy to withstand the elements and pesky local wildlife.

Dilemma: the more you build, the more your outdoor kitchen begins to feel like the indoors. Remember the architectural maxim: less is more (especially when it comes to cleaning).

F: Lounging/dining area

Summerwood offers a great line gazebos that are terrific for creating outdoor kitchens. For that genuine outdoor effect, we recommend models without walls to encourage airflow through. Make no mistake: guests will love your outdoor kitchen and so will you. It will be where everyone goes when you entertain. So make it big.

In each case you'll need to ensure the grill isn't too close to any supporting pillars or spindles. And again, be sure to build in decent ventilation -- ask the specialists for help if you're not absolutely sure. They love a challenge.

Speaking of ventilation, some gazebos are fully enclosed by walls of windows which open and close. They could easily house a kitchenette, plus offer the option of bringing the outdoors in when the weather's great -- or leaving them out.

While we're on the topic of windows, there's a lot to be said for a wall or two. They block wind and shape a natural gathering area.

Some customers extend the roof of their cabin, home studio or pool cabana well over one wall. A moderate extension creates a porch but a significant one provides a permanently covered patio. In either case, simply ensure your grill set-up isn't a potential fire hazard.

But who says it has to be outdoors to be outdoorsy? There are cabins, cabanas and studios. Why not install oversized windows or -- better still -- windowed doors? Then bring the outdoors in when the weather's worth welcoming. The natural light that windows provide brings an automatic lift in mood -- a boon to any mealtime conversation. Leave the ceiling open, ventilate it well and you can have all the advantages of an outdoor kitchen indoors.

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SheKnows: What about during the fall, winter and early spring. Can your structures help provide a pleasant dining experience during the cooler months?

Summerwood: While Summerwood's wall-free gazebos are perfect for an outdoor kitchen, after Labor Day it can get mighty cold north of the sunbelt. But our customers have had some excellent winters with our Coventry and San Cristobal gazebos. These models are "walled in" with opening and closing windows. In typical winter weather, a small space heater, a few candles and plenty of warm company is all you need to keep make dining a pleasure all year round. If it's just two of you, maybe bring along a comforter for the coffee afterwards.

Some customers use their San Cristobal to winter their less hearty plants -- like a greenhouse. It's a great idea and, provided they're not too numerous, they would only enhance the atmosphere at mealtime.

But if you're really looking for a structure to enjoy all year round, see our home studios and cabins. Fully winterized, they ensure a cozy dining spot all winter long. To insulate your cabin or studio properly, you need to avoid the accumulation of humidity (it deteriorates your walls) and maintain a moisture and vapor barrier between the inside and outside of your building. There are several ways you can finish the interior (cedar finishing, drywall, wainscoting, etc.) to be sure you have the appropriate insulation and vapor barriers. The addition of the enhanced siding package is a must. To help with this we include an exterior siding upgrade as a standard feature on our cabins. It's also an option on all other structures.

SheKnows: What types of furniture will fit in your structures?

Summerwood: Summerwood structures accommodate all types of furniture. Some of our models can easily house a formal dining room table. What a charming spot to share a meal with friends. On the other hand, our playhouses will comfortably seat several miniature chairs and a table. It really depends on the size of your structure and its intended use. What do you want to fit there? A workbench may go in a shed, an easel or desk in a home studio, a rocking chair in a gazebo, hide-a-beds or drum kits in garages! You decide.

SheKnows: Which structures are best for day/night time meals/activities?

Summerwood: Again, this depends on your intended activity. For instance, our spa enclosures comfortably accommodate hot tubs and good times. And our cabins can be large enough to accommodate the in-laws for an extended visit. You decide on the size and Summerwood creates and prices them accordingly.

But let's talk dining. Obviously the cabins need to be able to accommodate meals. But many customers also like to use the home studios as dining areas. Walking across the property for a meal adds adventure to the experience.

Our favorite? Well it's hard to beat the romance of a gazebo. In the prime summer hours, they provide much needed shade from the sun. Furthermore, Summerwood sells screening kits; they ensure the air continues to circulate through, but the bugs don't.

What seems to make the greatest impact on dining in such a structure is the amount of natural light, created by the number of windows. For example, the Santa Cruz model on page 9 of our catalogue. It resides in the garden shed section but shed a lot of light on it, as its many windows do, and we promise there's nowhere on your property you'd rather be.

Where to get more information: To get more information on Summerwood products, visit www.Summerwood.com. While you are there, take a look at the Design Center, an intuitive online tool, which lets you design your own structure without all those tedious years of engineering school. Try it out. It's fun!



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