

Take the celebration outside

SUMMER FUN

Rain or shine, throw your best backyard bash yet

Andrea Janus
For Metro

An outdoor party is a great way to bring together family and friends during the precious few hazy days of summer.

After you've set a budget and a guest list, create the setting, experts say. Treat your outdoor space as you would an indoor room.

Define zones for lounging and eating with area rugs to "tells guests where they should be doing these activities," says Melissa Davis, principal at Melissa Davis Designs. Waterproof rugs will withstand the weather, foot traffic and spills.

Whether you set a formal dining table or offer food buffet-style, put out cutlery,

and a range of flatware and glasses so guests can eat with ease.

To avoid broken glass in the backyard, the dollar store carries a range of dishes and utensils that look like the real thing but are, in fact, plastic.

For an evening affair, create lounge areas with some round or square poufs, candles and throw blankets, says Catherine-Lucie Horber, principal of Royal Interior Designs Ltd. and a some-time party planner.

"It's inviting, it's cozy, it's romantic," Horber says. "You want to have a party that people will talk about and remember."

Your guests will thank you if you add an outdoor heater on a chilly night, and mosquito-zapping lanterns or candles to keep bugs at bay.

Lighting is also key for any nighttime event. Strings of lights with round bulbs can look festive without looking Christmas-y, and spotlights are great for illuminating far corners of a backyard "so your guests aren't staring out at an abyss," Davis says.

For a daytime party, offer seating options in both the sun and the shade. If you don't have a retractable awning, an umbrella that can be tilted as the sun moves can be put anywhere around the yard.

Meanwhile, when considering your menu, go with lighter fare that will "cool you down a little bit," like a watermelon feta salad and Caprese salad skewers, advises Candice Sinclair, owner of A Sinclair Affair event planning in Toronto. Easy-to-carry options include mini grilled-cheese sandwiches and sliders.

For Canada Day, pick up some strawberry meringue tarts or strawberries dipped in white chocolate, while kids can enjoy sandwiches made using maple leaf-shaped cookie cutters, Sinclair says.

A bar cart can serve as a one-stop shop for drinks.

And last but not least: make sure you have a back-up plan in case of inclement weather.

If rain appears in the forecast, Horber recommends moving some furniture from

your house into the garage or basement and moving the bash indoors.

If you've got a bigger budget, a tent is always an

option, though an expensive one. A tent rental can run from \$800 to \$6,000, says Sinclair.

On a particularly hot day

you'll need air conditioning, and if it's going to rain, Sinclair says flooring for the tent is a must so guests' feet don't get soaked.



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