

BURNING *desire*

If you want to use your outdoor living spaces during the chilliest months of the year, you need to heat things up

Words Karen Booth



It's undeniable: the flicker of flames is entrancing. Whether it's the silent dance of a gas-fuelled fireplace or the crackle and pop of a wood-burning firepit, the effect is as mesmerising as it is relaxing. But warming outdoor spaces isn't just about creating ambience, it's about extending their use throughout winter and making them a pleasant place to be on a frosty evening.

"Heating is a great addition to the garden if you want to maximise the use of your outdoor space and enjoy spending time in it during the winter months," says George Nattrass, a garden designer at Growing Rooms. "Also, gardens have an entirely different atmosphere at night so sitting

around a fire, surrounded by foliage and bathed in a warm glow, can feel like being camped out in the woods. It can even take us back to our primal nature."

While the choice of heating options is broad — gas, electric, bioethanol and wood-burning — George says wood burners offer a compelling combination of benefits. "They can be either in the form of a fire bowl or a more permanent structure such as a built-in firepit or fireplace," he says. "They provide great gathering points to sit around with a drink and to toast marshmallows, and they are also a cost-efficient option requiring little investment, while providing a great place for friends to gather."

Ignite some interest

A firepit or fire bowl is now almost an essential inclusion if you entertain, and it can often be found surrounded by built-in seating or outdoor lounges, signifying its important role as a rallying point.

"Firepits are very popular year-round, but they take on a whole new level as we move into autumn and winter," says Matt Leacy, creative director of Landart Landscapes + Pools. "As the cooler weather sets in and temperatures drop, firepits become a really stylish and functional way to warm up outdoor areas and keep them suitable for entertaining. You can chat and cook next to the flames with family and friends, relax in the outdoors, and dispose of your leftover tree branches in the process — there are multiple benefits.

"You can also get an abundance of light from firepits, which enables you to continue making full use of outdoor furniture pieces. And they're much better in terms of ambience than portable lights and heaters," he adds. "That said, if you're looking at a firepit, it's important to consider how its size and style will fit within your overall outdoor aesthetic and space."

Firepits, which are usually made from mild steel, 316-grade stainless-steel or cast iron, cover a variety of price points. Firepits and bowls with a rust finish, such as the Brad and Angelina firepits, which are available from Aussie Heatwave Fireplaces, are the most prevalent, but black is also popular and ideal for contemporary settings.



OPPOSITE This outdoor entertaining space by Bayon Gardens boasts a firepit and built-in seating. bayongardens.com.au
 TOP Boasting a matt black finish and a cantilevered design, the Element firepit from Tait. madebytait.com.au
 ABOVE The Wood Store firepit is made from steel and will weather naturally to a rust colour. aussieheatwave.com.au



LEFT The open fireplace in this garden built by Signature Landscapes is a focal point. signaturelandscapes.com.au
BELOW A built-in open wood-burning fireplace can turn a wall in an outdoor room into a feature. gardenridge.com.au
BOTTOM Of sleek design, the cast-iron Morso Kamino chiminea from Aussie Heatwave Fireplaces. aussieheatwave.com.au



Flicker of flames

If you want to keep warm and create a laid-back ambience, a traditional wood-burning outdoor fireplace is perfect. These are permanent, built-in fireplaces that can be part of a freestanding structure or integrated into the wall of an outdoor room.

The fireplace will be built using stone, brick or concrete (the last two can be rendered and painted for a modern look), it will have a chamber lined with refractory (heatproof) bricks or a stainless-steel firebox, and it will need a flue that stands higher than all nearby structures. To reduce downdraught due to wind, a smoke shelf above the firebox will ensure the flue draws properly.

Having a wood-burning fireplace may

be the perfect backdrop for entertaining, but some effort is involved. To sustain the fire, you need to keep adding wood. Old ash needs to be removed and the flue periodically cleaned. If it's a freestanding garden fireplace, nearby trees need to be regularly pruned so there are no overhanging limbs, and an eye needs to be kept on sparks. You also need to keep an eye on smoke, lest it blow into your neighbour's garden.

When designing an outdoor fireplace or choosing where one should go, factor in storage. You'll need to have your wood supply nearby so rather than hiding the stack, turn it into a design feature by building a storage niche into the wall on either side of the fireplace.



Cheery chimineas

If you enjoy the flicker of real flames, consider a chiminea. When we think of chimineas, we tend to think of the traditional shape (a rounded body with a tapered vent above) and a rustic, earthy finish. The latter is due to the fact that chimineas were once exclusively made out of clay. Some still are, but because clay can crack over time, many are now fashioned out of metal (usually cast iron, bronze or steel).

The traditional, big-bellied style is not the only one available, of course. You can find cast iron chimineas with a streamlined shape and black

mat finish (such as the Morso Kamino, available from Aussie Heatwave Fireplaces) or Corten steel chimineas that look like a piece of contemporary sculpture. Irrespective of style, chimineas often have a door or grill to keep embers from escaping. Others come with an optional grill you can place within the heat chamber if you want to try some over-the-flame cooking.

Because chimineas burn solid fuel, they are best placed in an open, well-ventilated area rather than inside a covered outdoor room. However, the heat lasts a long time, up to a couple of hours after you put the last load of fuel in, unlike a gas or electric heater where the heat disappears as soon as the unit is switched off.

Bioethanol beauties

For those who prefer a clean-burning fuel and less fuss and muss, the bioethanol-fuelled fireplace or burner is a popular choice. “A bioethanol fire is an environmentally friendly fire that’s an alternative to more traditional sources of heat such as electric, gas or wood-burning fireplaces. These fires operate using bioethanol, a renewable energy source which burns clean and produces no harmful emissions,” says Stephane Thomas, director of The Fire Company.

Another reason why they’re so popular is that bioethanol fires don’t have flues or utility connections, which means they can be used in a wide variety of outdoor and indoor environments. “Freestanding bioethanol fires are perfect for many types of alfresco settings, including balconies, terraces, pool decks, patios, courtyards, larger gardens, outdoor rooms — the list goes on,” he says. “Of course a bioethanol fire can also be installed into custom-designed settings, such as stacked-stone walls or water features. You could even incorporate one into a sculpture — you’re only limited by your imagination,” adds Stephane.

A two-and-a-half to three-litre burner can give you up to about eight hours of burn time, unless you have it at the highest setting. Generally on a high setting you can expect to use fuel at a rate of a little over half a litre per hour. Just a word of warning, though: for safety reasons, tabletop bioethanol burners have been banned in several states and further limitations on portable decorative burners may be in the works.

TOP RIGHT Ideal for a deck, the Equinox from Brown Jordan Fires is a bioethanol-fuelled fire. brownjordanfires.com.au
BELOW For an individualised look you can integrate a gas fire or a bioethanol burner into custom-built surrounds
OPPOSITE Shown featuring a bed of white coals and a metal fascia, the Escea outdoor gas fireplace. chazelles.com.au



Why bioethanol?

- **Eco benefits:** Bioethanol is a compelling alternative to fossil-fuelled fires. It’s both environmentally friendly and energy-efficient, without the harmful greenhouse gas emissions associated with gas or wood fires.
- **Aesthetics:** Bioethanol fires look stunning and create a design statement in many outdoor environments. In addition, burning bioethanol creates a beautiful, lively dancing flame that is simply mesmerising.
- **Versatility:** The fact that bioethanol fires don’t have a flue or require any type of utility connection means they are portable and can be easily placed and moved to different parts of an outdoor (and indoor) living space.



Expert tips

- **Spot heat:** Focus on “spot heating” in the main area (for example, over an outdoor table) rather than trying to heat the entire outdoor space. This will be more efficient and help reduce both the initial purchase cost and ongoing running costs.
- **Plan ahead:** If you’re building or renovating, bring the connections to the outdoor area. Even if you don’t install outdoor heating immediately, it will be much cheaper to install the units later if the utility connections are already there.
- **Choose quality:** Bear in mind that many of the new heaters on the market are for permanent installation — they will actually contribute to an increase in the value of your house — so buy a good-quality product. Any money spent on an outdoor entertainment area is a good investment.

Tips provided by Thermofilm Australia.

It’s a gas

For a long time, when anyone mentioned gas heating, thoughts turned to patio heaters. While these are still a great option and the range of sleek, modern options is pleasingly broad, today you also have the option of a wall-mounted natural gas heater if you’re looking for a permanent outdoor heating solution in a covered outdoor room.

Then there are gas-fuelled fireplaces which replicate the look of a wood-burning fire. They can run on either natural or bottled gas and are a good alternative for those who feel a wood-burning fireplace would be too much hassle.

Gas fireplaces are easy to install into a wall or masonry cavity — no flue required — and come with a choice of

fascias for a clean-lined, modern look.

There is a choice of fuel beds (such as ceramic logs, pebbles or crystals) too, so you can customise certain elements to complement the decor in your outdoor room. If you build it into a freestanding wall, you can even have a viewing window on either side of the fireplace, doubling the enjoyment.

Freestanding, gas-bottle-fuelled patio gas heaters are preferred by some as they can be moved around, although they’re not exactly light. Up until recently, you generally had a choice of round pillar-shaped or “mushroom”-style patio heaters, but now there is a very elegant, almost sculptural option — the Heatstrip portable gas heater, which can heat an area of up to 16sqm.





Plug and play

With electric heating you have quite a few choices, the most popular being the Heatstrip radiant heater, designed for use in covered outdoor spaces. Available in black or white, these slimline strip heaters can be mounted on a ceiling or wall and are particularly effective if they're in a partially enclosed space.

George is a fan of the strip heater because of convenience and looks. "As they run off electricity, many can be plugged into a power point," he points out. "They can be easily fixed to overhead structures, are often much more subtle and modern looking than other forms of heating, and provide good heat. They're also the best choice when you're short on space."

According to Greg Trezise, national sales manager of Thermofilm Australia, "A key trend in new homes is that block sizes are reducing, which means so is the size of the backyard. As a result, the outdoor room or undercover alfresco area is becoming the focus for outdoor living rather than a huge backyard," he says. "This has led to an increase in demand for good-looking, high-quality heating products that blend in with these alfresco areas, and feature a more efficient design and lower running costs compared to past products. This is where electric strip heating steps in."

For spot heating of outdoor dining tables or lounges, the freestanding electric heater is ideal. There are many attractive options available, including the recently released freestanding Heatstrip electric heater, which has wheels, making it fully portable.

Adding value

So how important is it to consider heating when designing a garden or outdoor room? According to Greg, it's vital. "Often a significant outlay has been made on barbecues, outdoor settings, lighting etc, so you want to be able to use the area all-year round and not have to retreat inside as it gets cold in winter. And there are also cooler days and nights during spring, summer and autumn when outdoor heating is needed.

"Whether it's to warm up on a cold Melbourne night or take the chill off a mild Sydney evening, heating allows you to enjoy your outdoor area in comfort, so it is imperative to consider heating when designing an outdoor room or alfresco

living area. In addition, a good-quality, permanently mounted outdoor heater or fireplace will add significant value to your property and is always in demand for potential buyers/renters."

Adds George, "If you plan to invest in an entirely new landscaped garden or an outdoor room, look at ways you can maximise the time spent relaxing and enjoying it to fully capitalise on your investment. That includes some clever ways to heat outdoor living zones and extend their use through the colder months and on chilly evenings."

Clearly, good heating not only adds value to your home, it enhances your lifestyle, which is the most important benefit of all.

TOP Ceiling-mounted Heatstrip electric heaters work with a built-in fireplace to warm this room. heatstrip.com.au
BELOW The portable freestanding electric Heatstrip heater offers maximum versatility and style. heatstrip.com.au

