



Designer Mary Ann Kleschick and daughter Lily Q in their bright Philadelphia backyard. "You're a different person when you're outside," Kleschick says. "I think it should be more relaxed to match your mood."

SHARON GEKOSKI-KIMMEL / Staff Photographer

It takes just a little for a big-deal backyard

By Karyn D. Collins
FOR THE INQUIRER

Searching for a holiday haven? For more and more people, that quest begins and ends in the backyard, where a private oasis can be created.

"About 10 years ago the trend was to bring the outside indoors. Now, the trend is to bring the comfort and style of our interiors to the outside," said Philadelphia interior designer Mary Ann Kleschick. "You're creating a living room outside."

The options now available in stores even include outdoor love seats and area rugs made with materials that withstand summer heat, humidity, and rain.

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Kleschick's backyard oasis is accented with colorful flowers and pots. "You're creating a living room outside" — and don't forget to plan.



SHARON GEKOSKI-KIMMEL / Staff Photographer

Mary Ann Kleschick's daughter Lily Q, 6, plays on the grass in their Philadelphia backyard oasis. For illumination, which gives shadow and definition to an outdoor space, Kleschick has strung rope lights on the tree and installed a tiki torch.

Bit of pizzazz, big-deal backyard

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"There's been so much interest in this outdoor living trend that manufacturers have really responded with a lot of options for people and at every price point," said Melissa Birdsong, vice president of trends, design, and packaging for Lowe's Cos. Inc. in Charlotte, N.C. "It's really a whole different way of thinking about the backyard. Now it's about putting creature comforts outside and extending your living space.

"And this is a trend that can be done in any sized backyard."

Thanks to the wide range of options available, those setting up their outdoor oasis can create a virtual island of tranquility without overly disturbing their bank accounts, experts said.

"A lot of people are finding it's easy to save money and still get a new look by sprucing up what they already have," said Nick Blassmann, spokesman and garden store specialist for the Home Depot in Mount Laurel. "We have plenty of new furniture, but a lot of people are opting to spend, say, \$50 on new cushions and an umbrella instead of \$500 for new furniture."

Other popular items sought by backyard shoppers include outdoor firepots, tiki torches, colored asphalt, and the traditional standbys, perennials and planters.

But before you rush out and buy a bunch of items, it's

a good idea to plan what you want your backyard oasis to be.

"Just like an interior designer has a floor plan for the indoor space, the same applies with the outdoor space," Kleschick said. "You want to think about where everything goes, balancing the colors with the natural greens, juxtaposing things like the teak from your deck with the stone from a sculpture.

"All these things make an interesting, stimulating environment, but you need to plan so it all comes together."

But planning doesn't mean everything has to match perfectly, she added. While some interior designers recommend translating one's indoor style to the outdoors (contemporary inside and outside or traditional inside and outside), Kleschick said she preferred a more eclectic look.

"To me, it looks a little forced if everything is matchy-matchy. The outdoor space is unique. You're a different person when you're outside. I think it should be more relaxed to match your mood," she said. "I think it's more fun to mix it up a little bit when you're outside."

One way to infuse that fun in the backyard is to utilize color, experts said.

"We try to encourage our customers to use color, whether it's colored plants, colored containers, or brightly colored cushions. Color can spruce anyone's day up," said

Patrick Kirby, operations manager of the Lowe's of South Philadelphia.

Experts also recommended having different areas for your backyard — grilling, relaxation, children's play area, for example. Arranging furniture in groupings around these areas will further define your backyard space.

Lighting, whether candles, electric lights, or a combination, are also a crucial consideration when setting up a backyard oasis, experts said.

Kirby said solar landscape lights had been a big hit with customers.

"They're easy. They don't involve any wires or electricity, so the only cost is the lights themselves," he said. "The lamps are solar-powered so they will absorb any energy from the sun and then they light up at night. People put them along the walkway."

Kleschick said lighting can give shadow and definition to an outdoor space. It can also uplift and illuminate.

"If you have lots of plants and flowers, you might want to put some sort of light at the base of them to uplift and illuminate," Kleschick said. "Lighting, even something like rope lights, can add atmosphere and an ambience. I just put rope lights on my tree in my backyard, actually.

"It all goes back to the idea of having fun with your space," she said. "You can use the simplest things and really create something special."