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Fall for Outdoor Entertaining This Autumn

By Debbie Rodgers

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Aaaah, autumn! It's the perfect time to entertain outdoors --- most of the bugs are gone, the sun isn't scorching even though it's warm enough to enjoy an afternoon or evening al fresco, and there's a bounty of good things to serve for an outdoor meal.

Because the days are shorter in the autumn, outdoor entertaining in the fall calls for special attention to lighting and temperature.

Lighting

The earlier sunset will afford you an ideal opportunity to bathe your outdoor space in evening lights. Use soft light, but use plenty of it. Try dozens of votive candles in jars and glasses to protect the flame from the wind, hurricane lamps, or kerosene lanterns set on low. Create cozy seating areas and equip each with a glowing light source.

Heating

The method you'll use to chase the chill from the night will vary depending on your climate and your outdoor space. If you have a yard (and community by-laws allow), a campfire is a wonderful informal party setting. In smaller gardens, consider self-contained fire pits or a chimenea.

For a more formal affair, you can install a propane-powered heater. These units are available in a range of heating powers and prices. Or, drape attractive throws or quilts on each chair for your guests to wrap around their shoulders to ward off the night air.

Of course, you'll want to take advantage of the wonderful colors and textures of autumn in your decorating scheme and table settings.

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Color

Autumn's colors are deep and rich — russet, crimson, burnt orange, gold, dark green, and the color of hay. Use these hues repeatedly in tablecloths and settings, flowers, centerpieces, and even the food. Scoop out pumpkins and other squash and fit them with containers of water to make vases. Mass potted mums in vivid colors. Use orange Chinese lanterns, bright rosehips, stems of red or orange berries, or chilies. Wrap vibrant maple or sumac leaves around votive candleholders or napkin rings. Sunflower heads can be strewn on the tabletop, or left on the flower stalks in a container.

Texture

The textures of fall are earthy and rustic. Especially play these up if your gathering is informal — a corn roast, a bonfire, a jeans and sweater evening. Use burlap or rough cotton to cover your buffet table, and dish towels as napkins. Weigh down your tablecloth with apples or pears hung on rough twine. Or

use rattan placemats and wicker baskets. Terracotta pot saucers make great paper plate holders.

If you're hosting a fancy sit-down outdoor dinner, use the subtler textures of hydrangea blossoms and colored leaves on a linen tablecloth. Try bringing your indoor dining table outdoors for the evening—it will add unexpected elegance to your setting. Paint gold lettering on small gourds to use as place cards. Grace your table with late-blooming roses in crystal vases.

Whether you hold a harvest hoedown or a stylish sit-down dinner party for eight, fall for outside entertaining this autumn!

Debbie Rodgers, the haven maven, owns and operates Paradise Porch, and is dedicated to helping people create outdoor living spaces that nurture and enrich them. Her latest how-to guide "Attracting Butterflies to Your Home and Garden" is now available on her web site. Visit her at

and get a free report on "Eight easy ways to create privacy in your outdoor space".

Autumn Wreaths Mark The Season

By Dawn Keadic

Wreaths are sometimes thought of as a Christmas-only decoration. This is a short-sighted view, as a beautiful wreath can be used to decorate a home for any season. Wreaths made to celebrate the autumn months can be very attractive home decorations.

Autumn wreaths often attempt to take the most beautiful elements of the fall season and to combine them in one artistic statement. They will often feature the striking colors of fall foliage and often reflect an "outdoors" or "country" look.

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Autumn wreaths can be based on any number of foundations. Some have found the rustic and neutral look of a grapevine wreath makes a perfect foundation for an autumn wreath. Others may prefer to work from a woodier twig base. It is even possible to start with a basic wreath form (often made of foam and available at craft and hobby stores). Whatever option is used can work wonderfully as a springboard for beautiful fall decorating.

Autumn wreaths can be made from the season's fallen leaves. Such projects, although beautiful, are short-lived as the leaves dry and crack. As such, many wreath makers rely upon silk and other artificial leaves to decorate their wreaths. Accents are often provided by simple homemade bows. Small seasonal decorations (for instance a miniature scarecrow) are sometimes attached to the finished product with a glue gun as a way of commemorating the autumn months.

There are no rules or limits one must obey when creating an autumn wreath. The idea is to capture the essence of autumn in the wreath, and that can be accomplished in any number of ways. An autumn wreath is an exercise in creativity and many beautiful decorations have been produced around the theme.

Wreaths are not exclusively for the Christmas holidays. A decorative wreath can brighten any home, and wreaths celebrating autumn provide a unique opportunity to bring the essence of the outdoors into one's home.

Dawn Keadic enjoys decorating with wreaths, both indoors and outdoors. For more information on Christmas, fall and autumn wreaths, including wreaths you can make at home, visit

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