

Get your outdoors warm-weather ready

Part 1: Spring clean outside

Nothing jolts you into taking a fresh look at your outdoor living area faster than inviting guests over for your first patio party of the season. As usual, the get-together was my bright idea.

“We can sit outside and light the firepit,” I blurt to several business colleagues that I was inviting over for dinner. Because they had come to Orlando for a conference from colder places, including Montana, Illinois, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, I thought I would treat them to a spring evening al fresco in Florida.

Me and my big fat mouth, I think as I survey my outdoor living area and notice all that I’d been conveniently ignoring: The furniture cushions wore a layer of dust and pollen. Cobwebs hung in the candle lanterns like vestiges of Halloween. Mold and algae blossomed on the wood trim. A deserted bird nest clung in the eaves.

And when did those outdoor area rugs get so tired? Weren’t they new just yesterday? I lift a throw pillow and a lizard runs out.

911! My outdoor patio needed a warm-weather refresh — and fast!

“Mother Nature is hard on outdoor furniture,” said interior designer Patricia Gaylor, who splits her time between sunny Las Vegas and snowy New Hampshire, so understands the havoc all types of weather can wreak. Sun, rain, snow, wind, dirt, mold, critters,



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and insects conspire to decompose all things outdoors. It’s our job to beat those elements back.

I start moving the patio furniture and pressure-washing the back of the house. Next, I take the cushions off the furniture, vacuum them, hose down the furniture, and wash the all-weather rattan with soap and water. I run the glass candle lanterns through the dishwasher, and replace the melted pillar candles with fresh, white (unscented) ones. I cart the deteriorated area rugs to the trashcan, then hop online and order fresh ones. (Here let’s pause to give universal thanks for Amazon Prime.)

“I look at spring cleaning the outdoors as a sort of ritual,” Gaylor said. “It feels like part of the cycle of life, an outward act full of inward meaning.”

Well, that takes some of the sting out of it, I suppose.

Sarah Fishburne, director of trend and design for The Home Depot, said that in Atlanta, where she lives, “As soon as the weather turns nice, and all the leaves and pollen are done falling, I am itching to give my outdoor space a big power clean.” Now is that time.

Here’s how Fishburne and Gay-



When outfitting your outdoors, be sure to choose furnishings in materials that will stand up to harsh weather, such as those featured on this design board. Image courtesy of Patricia Gaylor Interiors

lor recommend we get our outdoors warm-weather ready:

- Size up the situation

Look around your outdoor space with an unjaded eye and take inventory. See what needs to be cleaned and refreshed or disposed of and replaced.

- Start with the right materials

Make cleaning easier and replacing less frequent by choosing good-quality, weather-resistant materials to begin with. Performance fabrics, like acrylic and polypropylene, hold up well outside, while natural fibers disintegrate faster. Look for solution-dyed acrylic fabric, such as Sunbrella or Cushion Guard, which are UV stabilized to prevent fading.

“In these acrylics, the color runs through the whole yarn,”

Fishburne said. “When you cut through a piece of regular yarn, it resembles a radish; all the color is on the outside. When you cut through solution-dyed-acrylic yarn, it’s like a carrot; the color runs all the way through.”

You will pay more up front, but it’s worth it, Gaylor added. Less expensive options, such as polyester, don’t hold up as well, especially under intense sun. Other reliable weatherproof materials include marine-grade, stainless steel (for appliances and cabinet hardware), recycled plastic polymers (for chairs and decking), and acrylic-fortified cement (for coffee tables and planters).

- Get the rugs right

When choosing outdoor rugs, look for ones made of polypropylene, a woven plastic material that

resists weather damage, and that sheds water and dirt.

To refresh outdoor rugs, shake, vacuum, suds down, and hose off. As with other outdoor fabrics, regular cleaning will help rugs last longer.

- Pressure wash

Start your cleaning process by pressure washing the outside of the house, including doors, windows, eaves, screens, patios, and decking. Some professional pressure washers can wash down your exterior with solutions that have a built-in algacide to discourage mold.

- Clean the furniture

Remove furniture cushions and hose down chairs, sofas, and tables. Get the underside, too.

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