

Must-have items for summer entertaining in the backyard

Summer entertaining season provides ample opportunities to soak up some sun and have some fun with family and friends.

Backyard barbecues and other get-togethers at home are even more fun when hosts ensure they have certain must-have items for summer soirees.

• **Fire features:** The days when summer hosts only needed a few extra lawn chairs and some burgers and hot dogs on the grill for a backyard barbecue are long gone. Though those items still have a place at backyard barbecues, summer parties have taken a step up. Fire features, whether it's a standalone fire pit, one built into a patio or a gas-powered fire ta-

ble, are now wildly popular. Fire features provide a welcome place to relax and converse with guests after the sun goes down. And much to kids' delight, a fire feature also paves the way for some post-meal s'mores.

• **Insulated wine cooler:** Coolers are great places to store water, soda, beer, seltzers, and other popular beverages. But what about wine? An insulated wine cooler ensures wine stays properly cooled but doesn't get too cold, which can happen when wine is stored in a more traditional cooler filled with ice. Bottles are simply placed in the insulated cooler (much like canned beverages slide easily into can koozies), and

the bottle can be kept on the table much like you would for formal dinners indoors. Hosts can go the extra mile by pairing insulated wine tumblers with their wine cooler.

• **Games:** Summer entertaining season might be all about relaxation, but games can up the fun factor at backyard gatherings. Cornhole is a wildly popular game, and customized cornhole boards can help hosts come across as party professionals. Ladder toss, bocce and wiffle ball are some additional games that can make the festivities more fun. Hosts who don't have a pool also can invest in an inflatable pool big enough to fit all the kids who will

be coming to the party.

• **Outdoor storage cabinet:** Hosts can save themselves the stress and effort of walking in and out for dinnerware and other table accessories by investing in a sturdy outdoor storage cabinet. As meal time draws near, hosts will appreciate that all the plates, napkins, utensils, and placemats are already outside. The top of the storage cabinet can double as a small but convenient buffet station for sides that aren't being cooked over an open flame.

• **Projector and screen:** A projector and screen can really up the ante on summer entertaining, turning a backyard barbecue into a great place to watch a game or cuddle

up after dinner for a movie night under the stars. Projectors and screens won't bust the budget, but those who have more to spend may want to consider an outdoor television. Outdoor televisions are built to handle the glare of the summer sun, but a retractable awning may be a good safety net for hosts who plan to spend many a weekend afternoon outside watching games or movies with family and friends.

These are just a handful of items that can up the ante on traditional backyard barbecues. Homeowners should know that there's no limit to the number of items that can make summer entertaining season more special.

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