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Fresh Air Food

Outdoor dining doesn't have to mean hotdogs and paper plates. Here's how to bring eye candy to your great outdoors

By GENEVIEVE KNAPP | CTW FEATURES

What is every perfectly set dining room table missing? Weather, breezes, birds and beautiful bright colored flowers, says Letitia Little, owner of Letitia Little Interior Design

in Savage, Minn. Dining outside is a chance to enjoy nature and get fresh air while relishing a sumptuous spread, but it can take some experience to make it more than a checkered tablecloth and picnic table.

"I try to create outdoor rooms," Little says. "That's a good philosophy when designing for outdoor spaces, like a patio, deck or screened porch. Make sure it has the feel of a room, the furniture is comfortable and it can withstand the weather." Surviving the weather is the biggest thing to consider when choosing outdoor furniture and decorations. Little says weather-resistant, lightweight, aluminum patio furniture is much prettier than it used to be; some finishes even mimic wrought iron. And acrylic fabrics are designed to stay outside all the time.

Melodie Schooley, an interior designer who owns Arrangements With Style in Pittsburgh, Pa., says buying fabrics and having them laminated is an option if your placemat or cushion options aren't up to par. You can also get custom-

made tablecloths if the splashy stuff in stores won't do.

"If you are going for more of an elegant look, just pick two or three colors and stick with those colors," Schooley says. "You don't really want to go crazy with a lot of colors." But when it comes to dishes and utensils, it's all about color. Because glass and china breaks so easily, they're no good to tote back and forth between the house and patio. That leaves plastic or acrylic, which usually come in colors that pop. Add potted flowers on the tabletop or around the patio, and dress the table up as if it were indoors.

"If you've got bright colors, like hot pink, orange and red, you might want to serve a Mexican meal and have that hot palate as well," Little says.

"Or if you are [looking for] something that is a little quieter and more subdued like pale blues and greens, you might have succulents or grasses on your porch and you might want to have an Asian menu. You can go further that way and make it a lot of fun."

Japanese lanterns, Tiki torches and candles can add to an outdoor aura. Little suggests café lights, which have larger bulbs than Christmas lights or hurricane lanterns, and are available in traditional or contemporary styles. Lighting candles and lights at dusk gives a festive air to everything, Little says. Another way to create a café or Mediterranean aura is to tile the floor - "Adding tile can really add a lot of pizzazz for a little extra cost," Schooley says.

When a patio becomes an outdoor escape, going 'out' to eat might mean just opening the front door.

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BABY STEPS

Going green is as easy as 1-2-3 ... 4

By ROBERT SHAROFF | CTW FEATURES

Want to jump on the green bandwagon, but not sure where to start? Well, worry no more - Angelo Surmelis, the host of HGTV's popular "Rate My Space" reality show, has you covered like old furniture.

1 Don't automatically discard your old furniture. Think about refurbishing and reupholstering sofas and chairs before investing in newer styles.

2 Use energy-efficient appliances and lighting as well as low-flow toilets.

3 For kitchens and bathrooms, consider using environmentally friendly flooring materials such as bamboo, cork or recycled rubber.

4 When building or repairing decks and terraces, use reclaimed lumber.

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Flea Market Etiquette

3 tips to follow for treasure-hunting happiness

By KATE SULLIVAN | CTW FEATURES

It may seem like a glorified rummage sale, but a flea market has its own class of conduct. Here's how to deal with the dealers, blend with the buyers and walk away with your prize, and your politeness, in tact.

Artful negotiation

Keep your conversations in the courteous zone, says Tom Delavan, decorating expert and former editor-at-large with "Domino" magazine. The art of the inquiry sets the tone for future negotiations.

"Just ask what the best price is for the

piece. Or if already marked, offer up a price anywhere from 10 percent to 20 percent off the tagged amount." Buying in bulk gives you more leverage. "If you purchasing more than one item, ask for more off the total," says Delavan.

Dealer-side chats?

Wait your turn - interrupting the dealer during a conversation with another potential customer creates a major flea market faux pas. Beth Harlow, owner of the Chicago antique décor shop, The Painted Lady, suggest waiting until the previous transaction completely closes before stepping in.

Hold, please

Depending on the time of day, a dealer might put an item on hold. For Delavan though, "Don't expect a dealer to put a piece on hold for more than an hour. Asking for 20 minutes keeps your request within reason." And if you decide not to purchase, make sure to go back and let the dealer know so the item goes back on the market. "If you say you are going to buy a piece and ask to put it on hold, you should follow through on your word," says Delavan. Choose your words wisely when requesting a timeout for your timeless treasure.

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