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## LET'S GO **AL FRESCO**

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OUTDOOR KITCHENS  
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## Cover Story

# Outdoor kitchens sizzling

Grills, refrigerators, TVs let homeowners spend more time soaking up the elements

Entertaining doesn't have to stop at your back door. Just ask Matt Ciaramitaro of Huntington Woods.

An avid griller and foodie, Ciaramitaro has hosted everything from a 50th birthday party to a graduation party to many neighborhood barbecues, all in his backyard.

But you won't see Ciaramitaro or his wife, Julie Robertson, furiously running back and forth between the party outside and their kitchen. They had a small outdoor kitchen with a grill built in their backyard two years ago, and it's ground zero for

food prep, cooking and socializing.

"It's become a gathering area," says Ciaramitaro, whose barbecues are so popular that neighbors often stop by as soon as they catch a whiff of whatever is on the grill. "Before, you had to run inside and out of the house. Now you have a work space, and you can really concentrate on your guests."

Outdoor kitchens are heating up in a big way. Even in Michigan, where winter can feel like it drags on for six months, more people want to bring their entertaining outdoors. And that's what an outdoor kitchen allows, says Glen Goldberg, founder and owner of Four Seasons Garden Center & Custom Landscape Services, which has locations in Oak Park and Birmingham and designs outdoor kitchens.

"More and more people are spending time at home, entertaining at home, and they're really taking the indoors outside to enjoy entertaining," Goldberg says.

"Kitchen" may be a broad term for these outdoor cooking spaces, but they're certainly more than a grill and counter space. Some have refrigerators, sinks and

**More online:** See more from these families' outdoor spaces at [detroitnews.com/homestyle](http://detroitnews.com/homestyle).



storage. Others have pizza ovens.

Michigan's tough winters can pose some challenges with outdoor kitchens, Goldberg says, but not a ton. Outdoor refrigerators and sinks need to be shut down for the winter, but a grill can stay outdoors — and be used — year-round.

Ciaramitaro says his family was in the process of making improvements to their backyard two years ago, addressing a sewer drainage problem and building a new shed, when they decided to take the plunge and move forward with an outdoor kitchen. They already had a deck, but they wanted a patio beyond that and a space for cooking.

Working with landscape designer and project manager Lynn Cavanaugh at Four Seasons, Ciaramitaro says he wanted it to be "friendly to both the preparation and the cooking itself."

What he got is a two-tier grilling and bar area made of Unilock's Brussels Block pavers, which have an antiqued, tumbled finish. It has a granite countertop with inset lights.

"Granite can handle the outside elements," Cavanaugh says. "You can clean it easily, and it looks nice."

The two tiers give Ciaramitaro space for food prep and serving, and with seating for four, he can mingle with guests at the same time.

And while space was a minor issue — Ciaramitaro's backyard is spacious but not huge — he worked with Cavanaugh to create just the right layout.

Cavanaugh says the same guidelines apply to designing an outdoor kitchen as an indoor one: Look at the space, how much you entertain and what essentials you want.



Colorworks Studio in Birmingham designed an outdoor kitchen in Ann Arbor that includes a spacious seating area, fire pit and 9-foot TV.



Boxwoods and arborvitae shrubs separate areas of a Pleasant Ridge outdoor kitchen.



Raya Howard enjoys a cup of water next to the U-shaped kitchen area, which has room for 10 bar high stools. Raya, 9, says golfers will often stop and ask, "What's for dinner?"



**MAUREEN FEIGHAN**  
Detroit News  
Design Writer

Gene Meadows

Max Ortiz / The Detroit News



Unilock's Brussels Block pavers, which have an antiqued, tumbled finish, were used for Ciaramitaro's kitchen area. The countertops are granite.

David Guralnick / The Detroit News

The TV blends naturally with a nearby 30-inch fire pit, patio seating area and the kitchen. The kitchen has a Burano, or rough-flamed granite,

countertop and includes a sink and refrigerator. The exterior matches the cedar and stone exterior of the house.

"They wanted everything very clean, very user-friendly, monochromatic with pops of color," Krass says.

Ti (pronounced Tee) and Ray Howard of Detroit also wanted a neutral palette when they turned to Goldberg to design their outdoor kitchen.

The couple lives just off the ninth hole of a Detroit golf course and loves to entertain. Ti says it was her husband's idea to create an outdoor cooking and entertaining space since he loves to barbecue and smoke food.

"We entertain a lot, and with the house being off the course, we just thought it

would be great to have something there to complement the house," says Ti.

And it does complement the house. The U-shaped kitchen area is made of tumbled brick pavers with granite countertops. Six bar stools allow the Howards to cook and socialize at the same time. To the right, a gray couch and lounge chairs with an all-weather finish from Restoration Hardware offer additional seating near a rectangular gas fire pit. Ti says the couple worked with Jeffrey King Interiors to design the outside seating area.

"It's a real treat for us," Ti says.

"The golfers don't seem to mind either. 'Every time we cook out here, they say 'What's for dinner?'" says the Howards' daughter, Raya, 9.

Creating an outdoor kitchen space can be pricey. Cavanaugh says high-end grills alone start at \$3,000-5,000. She says some customers are opting for modular outdoor cooking units with a refrigerator, grill and burner all in one unit that can be moved. Still, it's investment more are willing to make.

"People are increasingly considering the outdoor environment as part of their home ... and are using the outdoors extending well into November," Krass says.

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David Guralnick / The Detroit News

barbecue. The L-shaped kitchen area has a two-tier granite countertop; the lower tier become a gathering area," Ciaramitaro says.



David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Matt Ciaramitaro grills salmon during a neighborhood barbecue. The L-shaped kitchen area has a two-tier granite countertop; the lower tier is for food preparation and the other for serving. "It's become a gathering area," Ciaramitaro says.

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**MAUREEN  
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Detroit News  
Design Writer

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