

The ultimate guide to a kitchen garden

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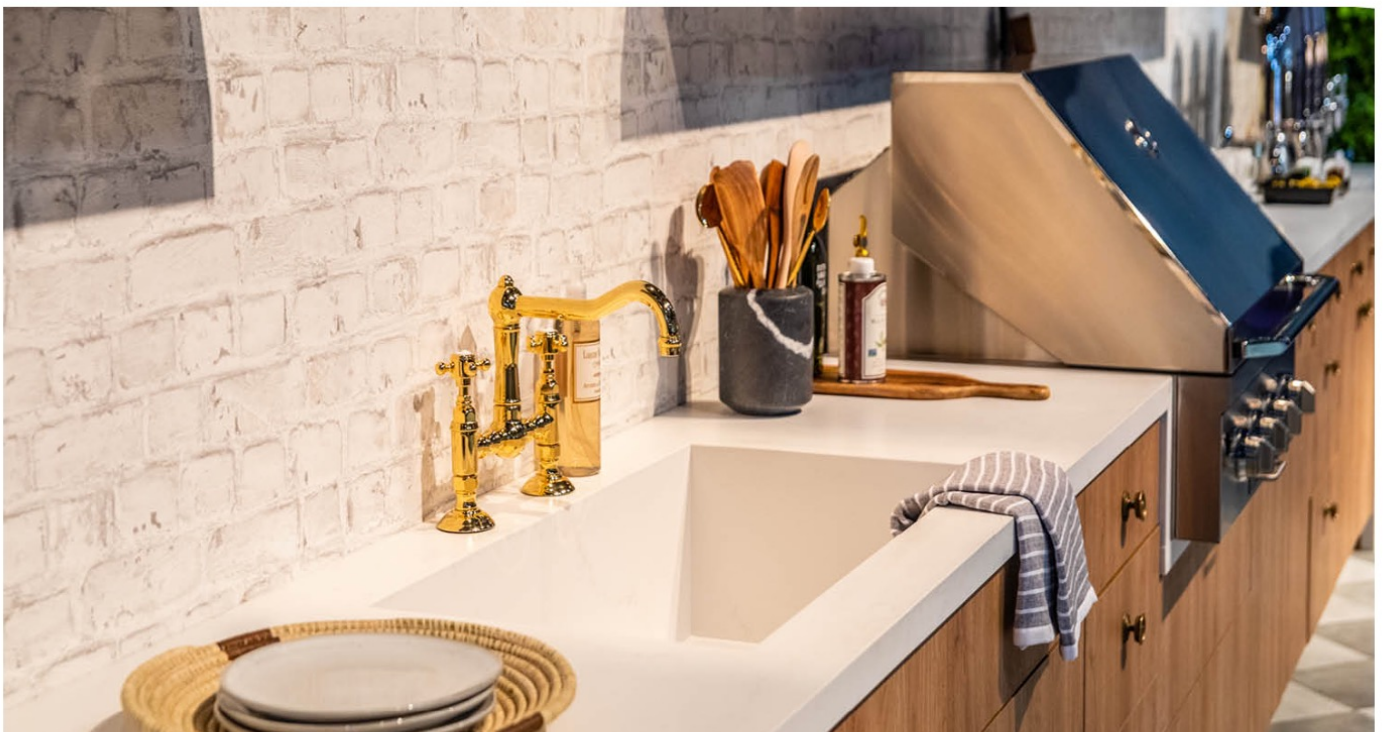
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When it comes to outdoor cooking, there's now a world of possibilities in the ultimate 21st century kitchen garden, writes Alexandra Goss

An outdoor kitchen is this summer's hottest garden craze, with Google Trends reporting a 160 per cent increase for the search term "outdoor [kitchen ideas UK](#)" since 2022 and the concept is one of the biggest talking points at this year's [RHS Chelsea Flower Show](#). But forget the basic barbecue – the best 21st century garden kitchens are as luxurious as their indoor counterparts, if not more so.

Invest in the best



Caesarstone

Homeowners are increasingly pushing the boundaries with their outdoor kitchens, says Ricky Davies, marketing director for [Sub-Zero & Wolf UK and Europe](#). “We’re working alongside designers to deliver remarkable alfresco kitchens featuring built-in grills, supersized seating areas with gazebos, log burners, outdoor televisions, bars and heating.”

The Savills Garden, designed by Mark Gregory of Landform Consultants ([landformconsultants.co.uk](#)), features the Chelsea Flower Show’s first-ever working outdoor kitchen. It’s a bespoke, state-of-the-art installation from KönigOutdoor ([konigoutdoor.co.uk](#)), which boasts a fridge, Fulgor four-burner grill, stainless-steel sink and Quooker tap. Gregory has even included woodfired pizza ovens that are custom coloured to pick up the shades of the plants.

Each day of the show, the acclaimed chef Sam Buckley will create a true “from plot to plate” experience by foraging for ingredients in the kitchen garden, which features a mix of ornamental plants, fruits, vegetables and herbs, from stepover fruit trees to chards, lettuces, watercress, chilis, rhubarb and samphire. He’ll then cook a three-course lunch for eight Chelsea Pensioners, who will sit in the adjoining dining area to enjoy their meal.

“This garden is about creating theatre – they’re called show gardens, after all,” Gregory says. “I want to create a beautiful palette to look at and to engage all the senses: the colours, the plants, the fruit, the vegetables and the smell of wood smoke from the pizza ovens.”

Add design details



Savills Garden RHS Chelsea 2023

The London Square Community Garden by James Smith, of [James Smith Landscape & Garden Design](#), has an outdoor kitchen and a pergola-covered meeting space with a large terrazzo table inset with chess boards, while an outdoor kitchen is also the focus of the Hamptons Mediterranean Garden, designed by Filippo Dester of [Garden Club London](#).

Its shady alfresco dining area and planting echoes the landscape of Dester's homeland. "In Italy, eating and entertaining outside is part of the culture but, since the pandemic, this is being embraced by people in the UK," Dester says. Estate agents confirm that gardens are now more important than ever, especially in the city.

"The value of homes with large gardens in London is up to 36 per cent higher than those with no outside space, on a pound-per-sq-ft basis," says Robin Chatwin, head of Savills southwest London.

What's more, a well-appointed outdoor kitchen can make a [property](#) more attractive, according to Grant Bates, head of private office at Hamptons. "Buyers always get excited by gadgets such as a Big Green Egg barbecue, as well as outdoor wine fridges and entertaining spaces."

With that in mind, here's how to elevate your kitchen garden into the ultimate alfresco extravaganza.

Consider the spec

Outdoor kitchens were once an uninspiring afterthought but can now often be more luxurious than the conventional indoor kitchen. "Space limitations can disappear outside and Teppanyaki plates, warming drawers and even cocktail stations become feasible luxuries," says Heather Hobbs, creative director at [Indian Ocean](#).

They also create a multifunctional extra space in the home. "It's not only a kitchen – it's also a bar, a convivial space, and a dining room," says Manfredi Conforzi, commercial director at [Officine Gullo](#). This brand's customisable outdoor kitchens offer the ultimate in open-air opulence and can be equipped with wine coolers, ice makers and beer dispensers, while its barbecues permit up to 15 different cooking methods, from grilling to smoking, steaming and frying; they can even be fitted with a pasta cooker or wok ring.

Another luxury Italian firm, kitchen and bathroom manufacturer [Scavolini](#), has just launched its first outdoor collection, Formalia Outdoor, while [WOO](#) and [Grillo](#) are modular kitchen brands often installed in London gardens, according to Dester.

Many high-end outdoor kitchens pair a traditional grill with a kamado barbecue and a pizza oven from the likes of [Ooni](#) or [DeliVita](#). [Gaze Burvill](#) produces sustainable oak outdoor kitchens, featuring appliances from Sub-Zero and Wolf – including barbecue-range rotisseries, sear stations and smoker boxes, as well as outdoor fridges and warming drawers.

Plan carefully



Scavolini

An [outdoor kitchen](#) needs to be practical but also private and not in a location where it'll annoy neighbours with smoke or noise. "It wants to be close enough to the home for ease of carrying food in and out but far enough away to create a sense of journey," says [Harry Holding](#), who has designed the School Food Matters Garden at Chelsea.

As well as thinking about elements such as gas, electricity and plumbing, you should also plan for storage and delineation of the space. "Create clear zones for cooking, dining, lounging and sunbathing," advises Ed O'Donnell, creative director of [Angel O'Donnell](#).

Opt for gadgetry made from high-quality, weatherproof materials and create shelter from both rain and sun. "If you have the budget, consider a pergola with lighting and heat, as this will open up your outdoor kitchen for near year-round use," says Joanne Bull, marketing manager at KönigOutdoor. "We have clients who hold a pizza and prosecco party every New Year's Eve in their outdoor kitchen."

It's also vital to think about how the garden will look in the colder months, says Samuel Pye, creative manager at [Echlin](#). "Pared-back aluminium seating from brands such as HAY and Fermob will look better in the winter than a corner sofa with a cover on it."

Garden design



Angel O'Donnell

To ensure year-round interest, Mark Gregory has put in a “backbone” of evergreen plants such as yew balls in his [Chelsea garden](#), while Dester has used arbutus unedo (strawberry trees) and rosemary for scent and cooking.

The experts advise keeping the material and planting palettes simple and investing in high-quality, locally-sourced natural materials. But you don’t need to spend a fortune on everything – Gregory is growing herbs and vegetables in old terracotta pots and galvanized buckets bought cheaply on eBay. Smith points out that you can also maximise space by attaching plant pots to walls and even planting herbs in tiny crevices and cracks.

The importance of [wellbeing](#) and highlighting where our food comes from is a key aim of Gregory’s Chelsea garden. “Even if people are inspired to grow some herbs on a tiny balcony, I will judge it a success,” he says.