



THE GREAT Outdoors

When warmer weather is upon us, the backyard is the perfect place to play host and entertain your guests. Michaela Skilney looks at the different ways you can entertain outdoors.



The backyard is an extension of the home, so in warmer weather, it's the ideal place to entertain. Nothing beats the atmosphere the great outdoors creates and with a little planning, a backyard party can be truly memorable. Let these fun suggestions inspire your next outdoor gathering.

RELAXED BBQ

The backyard BBQ, complete with mozzie repellent and plenty of beer, is an essential part of the Australian lifestyle. Perfect for a simple get together with friends or family, a relaxed BBQ is guaranteed to be a draw card and is sure to have your neighbours salivating. While you can partake in them any time of year due to their casual nature, BBQs are synonymous with celebration. From Australia Day and birthdays to the Melbourne Cup and Christmas, the backyard BBQ is a versatile get together you can throw together at a moment's notice.

Set the scene - A BBQ is a completely informal affair so there's little you need to do to prepare your backyard. Make sure that there's enough table space for people to sit and eat their meal though, as well as enough chairs so nobody has to stand. As you'll most likely serve your food buffet style, setting up one large table that people can walk around and help themselves to is a great idea.

Most BBQs take place during the warmest parts of the day so it's also a good idea to have sunscreen on hand, a sun umbrella for shade, plenty of water and bug repellent so flies and creepy crawlies don't spoil your day.

Food for the masses - The BBQ is one of the simplest events to cater for. Not only is the food prescribed for you, friends and family more often than not are happy to pitch in and provide a plate.

Meat is the key player of the day with sausages, rissoles and steaks taking centre stage. Chicken skewers, prawn kebabs and marinated chicken wings are also instant crowd pleasers. For the vegetarians of the group, make sure you have veggie burgers on hand, coleslaw and plenty of salads ranging from garden, pasta and potato to roast vegetable and bean. Finish the day off with the ultimate in Aussie cuisine, a mouth watering Pavlova.

The perfect drink - A simple BBQ calls for simple drinks to be served. You couldn't possibly detail drinks for an Australian BBQ without mentioning beer. The amber substance is a BBQ staple and if you want to please the males cooking your meat, make sure there's plenty of cold beer on tap. Provide a few other options for those who don't like beer or prefer to drink something without alcohol. Champagne is always loved by the ladies and soft drink will satisfy your littlest guests.

Songs to sway to - Laid back beach music will immediately set a relaxed tone. Songs by the likes of Jack Johnson and Ben Harper are easy to listen to and will please everyone's ears.

INTIMATE SOIREE

In balmy weather, a candle lit dinner under the light of the moon with a glass of wine and great friends is the perfectly intimate choice. Romantic lighting and opulent table settings create a sophisticated ambience that is sure to impress your soiree guests.

With a hectic work load and children to look after it's easy to just spin a spaghetti meal together to serve your friends when they come to dinner. So your guests will find it refreshing and a complete surprise when you host an intimate party and will be hailing you a domestic goddess for months to come.

Set the scene - When it comes to styling, a single colour scheme will look extremely stylish. Imagine a table setting entirely consisting of white objects from vases, plates and napkins to table cloths, candles, chair covers and elegant flowers. Red and black are other grand options to consider.

To ensure your guests know this isn't just any backyard dinner party, enhance the glamorous feel of the night with personalised place cards and printed menus describing the night's fare.

The perfect drink - As opposed to other outdoor occasions, an intimate dinner party requires you to create individual plated meals as opposed to letting your guests help themselves from crowded platters.

A full sit down dinner may be required but that doesn't mean you can't have fun with presentation. Get your children to act as waiters and serve your dinner guests meals you've pre-prepared so you can enjoy the night with them, and not be stuck in the kitchen.

Follow an entrée of seared tuna steak with a rack of lamb balanced on a bed potato mash and an intricate chocolate dessert, or select a specific cuisine like Italian and serve soup with crusty bread, risotto and assorted gelato.

The perfect drink - Wine is the ultimate choice for an intimate soiree. More than any other backyard party, choosing the right bottle is essential. As you'll be highly familiar with your guests, buy a variety you know they will like.

Whether you go for red or white, make sure it also complements the food you are serving. A small gathering also allows you to be a bit more selective with your drink choices, meaning you can splurge on a few great bottles.

Songs to sway to - A classy event such as this begs for classical, timeless tunes to slowly hum in the background. Call on all time great Frank Sinatra, or for a contemporary twist, play Michael Bublé and Harry Connick Jr.





SUMMER POOL PARTY

If you're lucky enough to have a pool, chances are you host plenty of summer pool parties. Friends and family will come from far and wide to cool off on hot summer days in your backyard so it's essential to know how to host a perfect poolside do. While it's nice to simply splash about and escape the sun's rays, why not turn the occasion into a fully fledged fiesta?

Set the scene - A pool party is all about fun. This allows you to go wild when it comes to setting up your space with a colourful table setting and summer accessories. Pay homage to tropical destinations by decorating your table with grass table mats, floral leis, colourful tumblers and tropical flowers floating in glass vases. For a finishing touch, position beach balls around the area to complete the theme (these can be used in the pool later).

Feed the masses - While you may spend most of your day in the pool, it's essential to make sure there's plenty to eat. As the weather will be warm, provide your guests with a selection of cool, light foods that are easy to eat. Fruit salad is a perfect choice. The tropical colours of a fruit salad or platter will add a festive feel to your party and will quench people's thirsts after sunbaking on beach chairs.

Treat your guests to an old fashioned ice cream sundae in between swims, with scoops of vanilla ice cream, caramel sauce, chopped nuts and of course, a cherry on top. If little ones with floaties on their arms are running around, stack your freezer with colourful icy poles.

The perfect drink - A poolside party is just screaming for cocktails. Vibrant cocktail hues of pink, blue and yellow will get you in the party mood and will match your summery swimwear. The classic Cosmopolitan will please the masses as will a delicious Fruit Tingle or Tequila Sunrise.

For those not wanting alcohol, mocktails or cold, creamy fruit smoothies will do the trick. Throw a banana, some frozen berries and a cup of milk into a blender for a nutritious drink to help your stamina while swimming. The blender will also come in handy for all important cocktail making.

Songs to sway to - A pool party requires energetic music to reflect the excitement an afternoon playing in the pool creates. Play a tracklist with great summer songs ranging from The Beach Boys' 'Surfin' USA', David Lee Roth's 'California Girls', Kylie Minogue's 'Loveboat' and 'Summer Lovin'' from Grease.

AFTERNOON GARDEN PARTY

Freshly mown lawns, paths lined with daisies and a playful swing hanging from a tree are the perfect surroundings for an afternoon garden party. Making the most of sunny weather, a garden party shared with close friends is great for those wanting to host a cosy event. Ideal for girly occasions, including baby showers, birthdays and even hen's celebrations, a garden party is easy to throw.

Set the scene - Take your cue from interior design style Shabby Chic. Mix and match feminine fabrics, select odd pieces of swirly garden furniture and create a soft setting with floral cushions and table cloths in checks or lace. Base your colour palette on a spring garden in full bloom and design your space around combinations of green, white and pink.

Feed the masses - A gorgeous garden party calls for equally gorgeous party food! Imagine traditional high teas and the Mad Hatter's feast in *Alice In Wonderland*. More than any other party, the food at a garden party needs to be visually appealing.

Making your food bite-sized is not only adorable, it will make it a lot easier for your guests to eat as well as mingle. Mini quiches, club sandwiches, asparagus rolls and delicate voulevants are great savoury options but when it comes to sweets, the sky is the limit. Scones with jam and cream, iced cupcakes and mini muffins are just some ideas to get your party started.

The perfect drink - Whether you'd like to serve alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages, a garden party is a rare occasion where you can have complete fun with the drinks you serve. Tying in with the setting of your party, pink is a great theme to carry through to your drinks. Bubbly pink champagne, pink lemonade and rose coloured punch filled with watermelon and floating strawberries are just some refreshing options.

Songs to sway to - Highlight the nostalgic essence of the day with tunes from times past. Sweet jazz music from Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday will instantly get your guests in a girly mood.