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February 2005

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Lawn & Garden:

Make Your Outdoor Spaces Inviting

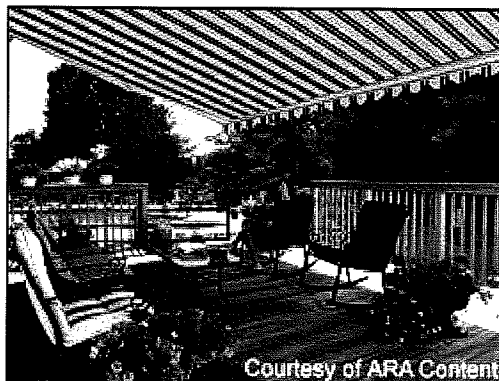
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(ARA) -
With
summer
approaching,
homeowners
begin to
dream of
enjoying
their time
outside. But
in the days
of winter it's
easy to
forget that



an inviting outdoor space takes a bit of planning, if you're going to really spend hours in the backyard.

It's easy to create an al fresco haven with only a few simple additions. With the right features you can have privacy, shade and serenity to enjoy all summer long.

Don't let the sun chase you off your deck. As temperatures rise, glare and heat can chase you inside on summer afternoons. Popular in Europe for more than 20 years, retractable awnings let you enjoy the outdoors on even the warmest days. Not only will the fabric awnings block the sun's heat outside, the awnings will also improve indoor spaces by saving money on air conditioning bills and protecting carpets, drapery and upholstery from the UV rays that cause fading.

Experts recommend choosing an awning that requires little or no maintenance. Look for all aluminum baked-on enamel and powder-coated finishes, as well as durable

fabrics and seams for the awning itself.

"Retractable awnings are growing in popularity because with the push of a button, you can have shade in an instant or retract it out of sight when you want the sun," says Debbie Stone, spokesperson for Pennsylvania-based Craft-Bilt, an industry leader with more than 50 years experience. "Consumers should look for systems that are built to last, using the highest-quality materials, and backed by a warranty. Craft-Bilt awnings never need painting or lubrication, and are TUV approved -- the European designation similar to the U.L. approval we see in America. We also pride ourselves on using Gore Tenara thread, which is guaranteed to produce seams that last the life of the fabric."

"We had French doors in our living room and the sun was heating up the house and changing the color of the carpet," says Michelle Navon, a homeowner in Massachusetts who installed a Craft-Bilt retractable awning about five years ago. "We thought about installing curtains or tinting the windows, but we didn't want to change the look of the French doors. The awning does a great job of keeping the house cool, and it looks great too. We enjoy its benefits indoors and out. Our backyard gets direct sun all day, but we can enjoy being outside because of the shade of the awning."

The deck or patio is a favorite spot for many families, providing a space for entertaining, dining or simply enjoying a good book. But it can also feel like a stage, with you as the star for the whole neighborhood to watch. Privacy fences and trellis systems don't allow you to enjoy your lawn and garden views, and can be hard to install and move. Instead, consider using plants to screen the perimeter of your patio. Potted plants in various heights will add a lush feeling. Consider grouping three containers at each corner to define the space, or line up a row of tall topiaries along one side.

To really make your patio or deck work for you, be sure to consider how you and your family will use it most. If it will function as an outdoor dining area, it's worth it to invest in a high-quality table and chair set that will withstand heavy use and provide comfortable seating. Small pots of herbs nearby will enhance meals with fresh-from-the-garden flavor. For those that like to relax, a chaise or glider is a must. Add a small weather-resistant table to hold a cool drink or reading glasses. Block out traffic noise with a water feature. Many models simply plug in to outdoor outlets and use very little water. You can find a variety of styles to fit your décor, whether it's Asian-inspired, classical Greek or Roman or whimsical fairies and colored glass.

With the right ambiance and accessories, your own backyard can be the most popular room in the house.

To learn more about retractable awnings, visit www.aristocratawnings.com.



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