



Photo: Country Living Gardener: The Tranquil Garden

**Creating well-defined outdoor garden rooms means you'll use your yard more often and more effectively.**

BY KIMBERLEY SELDON

*Think quickly* ... which is the most expensive room to decorate? If you answered the kitchen, you're not alone. But, if you're like me and you spent \$750 this past weekend at a nursery just on con-

tainer plants, you are going to consider the possibility that your garden is the most expensive room to decorate.

Although a kitchen renovation or makeover is costly, the investment imme-

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diately begins to amortize. Not the garden. The garden is like a toddler – insatiable, uncontrollable, maddening and often endearing.

A garden requires continuous, ongoing maintenance, and year-round renewal. Plus, it makes you do crazy things, like ruin a favourite dress because you couldn't resist the urge to do a little weeding before going out for dinner, or spending a small fortune on plants.



*Put as much distance as you can between you and interior distractions such as ringing phones.*

Since I spend so much time, energy (and money) reining in my garden, you can imagine I want to enjoy it on every conceivable occasion. Creating well-defined outdoor garden rooms allows me to use my garden more often and more effectively. Rather than just plunking some furniture into the garden, I've chosen to create my own private paradise, and you can too.

### **Delineating garden rooms**

Like interiors, exterior rooms function better when we carve out specific areas for relaxation, recreation and tasks. Consider the various rooms that might suit your garden.

■ *Alfresco dining room:* Even a tiny portion of a deck, patio or grass can be converted into an alfresco (in the open air) dining room. Choose an area close to the house, facilitating easy serving and clean-up and providing shelter from wind.

Choose a table that complements the scale of the deck or patio. For example, to accommodate a four-foot-diameter

table, a minimum nine-foot by nine-foot space is required. As with indoor dining, allow four feet of clearance between the table and a wall or railing for major passageways.

Although the majority of outdoor furniture can withstand inclement weather, most will last longer if it is moved to shelter during the winter. For this reason, unless you have an enclosed storage structure, consider lightweight furniture options

such as wicker, resin or metal frames with woven seats.

■ *Cook centre:* Increasingly, outdoor enthusiasts are looking beyond the barbecue to full-service cooking centres. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is by purchasing or building a barbecue island. An instant kitchen, the barbecue island might include storage space, warming drawers and even a small refrigerator.

■ *Thoughtful Spot:* That's not a spelling error, as I learned from one little orange bear named Winnie the value of creating a quiet spot for reflection. My 'Thoughtful Spot' is a humble stone bench, given to me by a favourite gardener. It is surrounded by items of personal meaning, such as the raspberry bushes my children insisted, despite my advice, would grow (they were right of course).

To create your own Thoughtful Spot, position furniture arrangements towards the best view, facing away from the house if possible, and put as much distance as you can between you and interior distractions

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such as ringing phones.

If outdoor reading is a priority, comfortable seating is essential. A high-back chair with arms, whether woven, wicker or wood, cradles the body and offers an immediate sense of security. Add a small table to accommodate a tall iced tea.

Add ambient sound, such as a trickling



**Kimberley Seldon**

water, lilac and jasmine to infuse the surroundings with delicious fragrance.

■ *Play areas:* For a lucky few, a swimming pool is the ultimate backyard extravagance. Beyond a pool there are dozens of options for play areas – a hot tub, sand box, croquet court or trampoline are just a few. Our play area consists of a basketball court that gets a lot of use at family gatherings. Often the children will disappear at the end of a meal to shoot hoops, leaving the grownups to linger over coffee. Make sure to position any play area away from eating areas to avoid accidents.

### Steps to creating a garden room

When you devote the same careful consideration to outdoor space planning as you might to indoor space planning, the rewards are gratifying. Here is a suggested work order.

■ *Space planning:* Determine the specific tasks involved in each area before you make any purchases. A landscape architect or garden designer (and even some interior designers) can help with decisions.

■ *Furnish by function:* Prior to purchas-



**The top-of-the-line Sports Bar and Grill from Cal Flame offers everything a gadget-loving outdoor chef could possibly want, including four automatic awnings, two sets of track lighting, three flat-panel monitors, a DVD and CD stereo system, mood lighting and more. You can get details from Ancaster Custom Pools in Hamilton, Ont.**

water fountain or playful wind chimes, to mask city noises and foster serenity. Consider flower plantings such as rose-



### DID YOU HEAR...?

- It's recommended that kids 4-8 consume no more than 17 grams of saturated and trans fats in a day, yet one typical fast-food order of a kid's meal – chicken strips, fries, pop and a small ice cream – provides 19 grams of fat and over 900 calories.
- A 22-ounce soft drink in a fast-food restaurant typically contains 18 teaspoons of sugar.

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ing furniture, consider the number of people who will use the area and the time of day it will be used. A comprehensive lighting plan, using a variety of light fixtures, is essential if you plan to enjoy the area at night as well during the day.



*Add ambient sound, such as a trickling water fountain or playful wind chimes, to mask city noises.*

■ *Add colour:* When decorating interior spaces, we rely on fabrics and wall colour to determine a decorative palette. Outdoors, we rely on plants and flowers for much of the impact. Again, it's wise to hire a professional or consult a reliable nursery before making any purchases.

■ *Accessorize:* No room, whether indoors or outdoors, can be considered truly personal without the addition of valued

objects. A stone sculpture, a mercury gazing ball, a weathered sundial, or an inviting birdbath increase personal satisfaction within your outdoor oasis.

For anyone who prefers dirt under the nails to a French manicure, or a family

barbecue to dinner in a fine restaurant, a well-designed garden room can provide a full year of satisfaction in just 15 short weeks. 🌿

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■ *Kimberley Seldon is an internationally known designer and writer, as well as host of Design for Living with Kimberley Seldon on Toronto One television and a regular guest on City TV's CityLine. For more information, visit [www.kimberleyseldon.com](http://www.kimberleyseldon.com).*