

Summer Gardens

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Hosting a Summer Party

Once your house is all fitted out for summer, it's time to invite friends over. Summer is perfect for picnics, brunches and campfires — get-togethers that allow you to eat outside, serve light, fresh foods that don't require lots of cookies and decorate with flowers, colorful patterns or maybe a traditional red- and white-checked tablecloth.

Brunch

Brunch combines the best of breakfast and lunch. You can serve sandwiches, quiche, waffles, fruit, coffee, champagne, juice, salads and so many more light foods — try to avoid baking, at least the day of, to keep from heating up the house — and have seating outside to take advantage of the summer weather. MarthaStewart.com recommends using seasonal fruit and fresh-squeezed orange juice and serving foods in bright-colored dishes and vintage-looking wooden spoons. Decorate with fresh flowers or ferns.

Summer Decor

Winter is over, spring cleaning is done and it's time to re-decorate with lighter colors and fabrics, flowers and fruit and all the decorations that make your house feel like summer inside and out. House Beautiful offered a list of fairly inexpensive, do-it-yourself options.

Add Color

Keep fresh flowers in a vase on the table, counter or bookshelf, swap out dark drapes for light- or bright-colored window coverings, add a couple of colorful throw pillows to the couch and exchange your bed coverings and towels for brighter, lighter or patterned versions. Stumped when it comes to color? Visit a local design or paint shop and see what's in style now.

Summerize your Fireplace

Once it's cleaned, you can keep candles, plants, flowers or other summer items in your fireplace, providing decoration during a season when you won't be building fires.

Change up your Furniture

Want to feel like you're on a boat or on the beach?

Change up your upholstery, either permanently, through DIY reupholstery, or by adding new throws, pillows and trimmings on the furniture. You can plan colors and patterns with a nautical or tropical or forest theme, helping to bring a little of the outdoors into your living room.

Whitewash It

To immediately bring in a summery feel, paint dark wood or dark walls white or other light colors — light blue, green or yellow make a house or a room much brighter. This doesn't have to be entire rooms or even entire walls; look at trim, staircases, doors and other smaller areas.

Picnic

Pack a basket and head outdoors! You can do this in a park, at a table, on a blanket or on the beach. You can go traditional with sandwiches, cookies, lemonade and fresh fruit or vegetables, but you can dress up a picnic too. Bring fresh, crusty bread and cheese, add fruit skewers and dip, put together fancy sandwiches and homemade baked goods or bring along cold chicken. Taste of Home recommends bringing a picnic basket and a cooler for cold food and beverages and packing your basket in the reverse order of things you'll need.

To make a day of it, bring croquet, bocce ball, a Frisbee or other games. Go at sunset or find a new, out-of-the-way park to enjoy the view, or go to a lake or swimming hole and work up an appetite with a dip.

Add Hanging Plants

Bring your garden inside with hanging plants in the dining and living rooms, patio and other places. Flowers spilling out over the side of a hanging basket provides a different kind of ceiling decoration than a fancy light and makes a room seem brighter and more colorful.

Add a Fire Pit

You can build a firepit or buy a small metal pit for your backyard, which means campfires, s'mores, hot dogs and sitting around the fire for hours, an ever-popular summer activity, right into your space. Adding a picnic table to your backyard, if you have room, helps to bring even more summer fun into your yard. You can find the supplies for these easy projects at any home improvement store.

Install a Mirror

Mirrors make rooms look bigger and brighter. You can set one up on a table near a window, giving it lots of light to reflect, and surround it with flowers, plants and other decor.



Campfire

Invest in foods that can be cooked on a stick. S'mores and hot dogs are traditional and shouldn't be overlooked, but sausages, vegetables, fruit, chunks of meat and even garlic bread can be speared and cooked over a fire. Put chairs or rocks around the fire and keep utensils and plates to a minimum, allowing people to eat with their hands and get a little messy. Liven up your s'mores with different types of chocolate or by adding peanut butter to the graham crackers. If you're less inclined to cook with a stick, make foil dinners with your favorite meat, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots or cauliflower and salt or pepper. Make sure to cook the meat before packing the dinner.



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