



Creating the Ultimate Pool Patio Space

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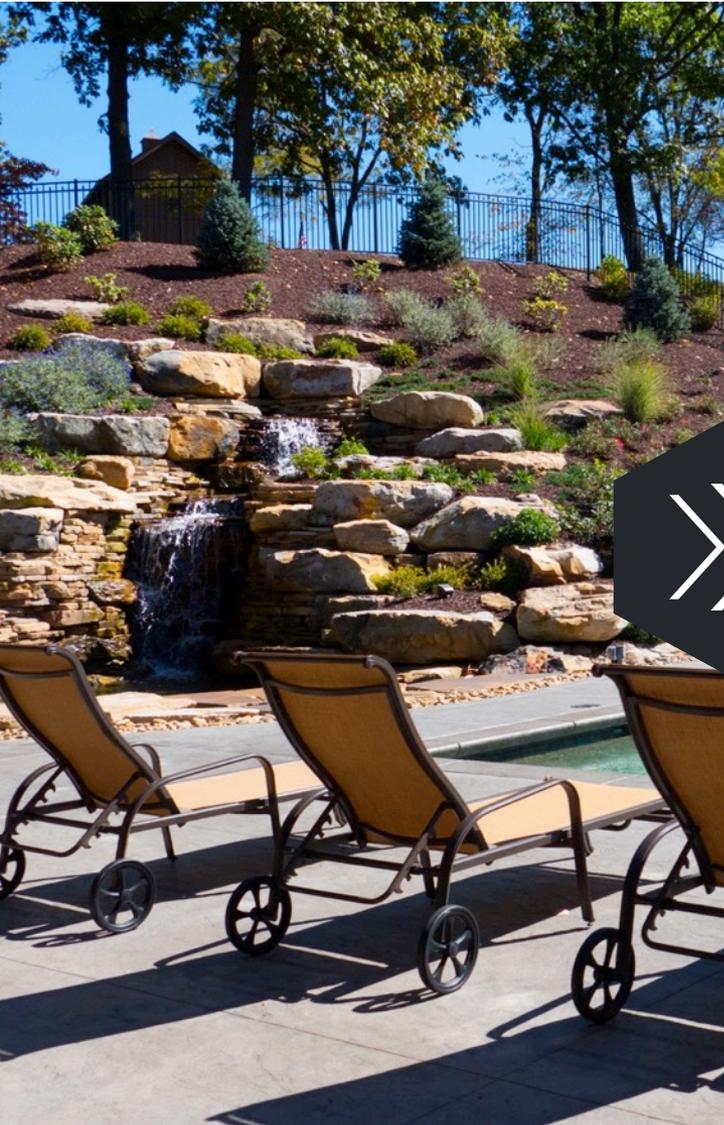
Everything you need to know for planning a perfectly stunning pool area, including your landscaping and patio.



What You'll Find Inside



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Just like with your interiors, picking a framework – a guiding design preference is the first step.
- » **Choosing Flooring Material**
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An outdoor living space isn't complete until you have the pillows!
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Western Pennsylvania has many landscaping designers– how do you pick the right one?



Starting with Design Principles

Setting the right foundation for the rest.

Just like with most things that end up great, swimming pool spaces begin with extensive thought and planning. And before any of the finer, perhaps more fun, design details like colors, materials choices, and styles can be considered, a few very important elements must be addressed.



Step 1: What are the existing conditions?

First up, let's have a look at the existing plot or site. What conditions must be dealt with when creating this new space? Usually, when you visit a truly amazing living space, either indoors or out, the design is one that works very well with the surrounding native conditions. There are a few important factors to consider during this step.

Are there any existing views that you would like to keep? Maybe there's a mountain range visible from the back door sliders that we have to maintain. If not, then now is a good time to realize that you will need to create some kind of focal point for your patio space like a fountain or a special ornamental tree.



Secondly, take notice of what is referred to as the microclimate of your property. All this means is to identify factors that will affect you and your guest's comfort while using the patio. Often finding things like really hot spots without natural shade or windy sections of the land unsheltered from prevailing winds can make or break an outdoor living space. Knowing these factors in advance will allow you to place an overhead shade structure in just the right spot or install large tree plantings that will work to block strong winds from reaching guests.

Step 2: Get your basic property map.

While your new outdoor space may become an important part of your family's home, it is not the only part. Remembering this will make sure you don't create your pool area in a vacuum.

Working with a basic drawing of your property and house, now updated with your existing site conditions, it's time to begin roughly locating where the main elements of the design will be.

Consider things like traffic flow from the house to patio, from the driveway to the patio, the outdoor kitchen, bathrooms, and so on. Thinking what it would be like to use the spaces is a great way to identify problem areas in the current layout and avoid problems in the new one.



Properly locating special features like fire pits and outdoor kitchens is crucial for the success of the project. For instance, an outdoor kitchen should not be located too far from the indoor kitchen or else entertaining will be more like a workout session than fun. A fire feature should be protected from prevailing winds and visible at night from the main seating area and so on.

Drawing simple bubbles for these elements on the map is a perfect way to start framing out the spaces.

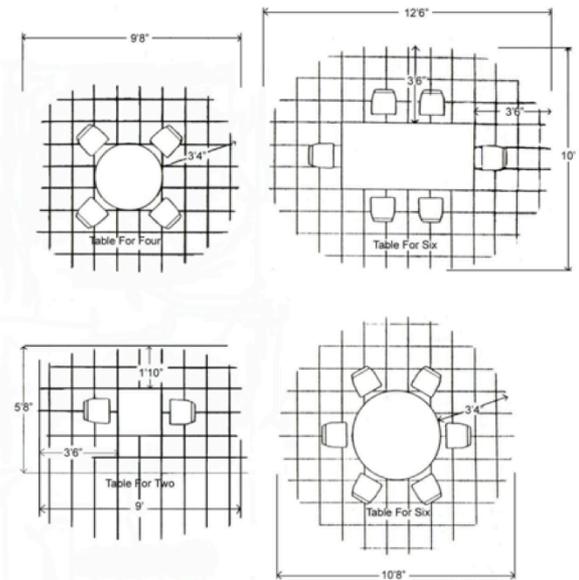


Step 3: Size it up.

Considering how you will actually use your backyard is the best way to solve for the sizing question. How big is your family? Do you like to entertain regularly? What type of furniture do you like and what are the dimensions? Questions like these are extremely helpful in making sure to not go too small or too big for the patio, outdoor kitchen, and everything in between.

After you consider what you'll need to fill the spaces with, think of your outdoor spaces just as you would your indoor living room and kitchen. This is an excellent way to get a feeling for spatial sizing. Considering the trends in outdoor living today, chances are pretty good that you will find yourself using your landscape spaces just as you would your indoor home.

Finally, use visuals (or ask for help from a landscape designer). To get you going, use the below image to determine how much dining room you'll need (from the concrete network).





Choosing Flooring Material

Function and Beauty.

Just like so many products today, the dizzying options for concrete paver styles from manufacturers like Unilock, Techo Bloc, and others can be a daunting task. So many catalogs filled with ideas to look through which are fantastic for inspiration, but can be overwhelming! So how do you begin to narrow down the choices to something that you know will match well with your home's exterior and last forever?

First things first.

Let's face it. Just like when deciding on colors and styles for the interior rooms of your home, the style of your outdoor flooring is crucial to your satisfaction. Many manufacturers offer tools like real outdoor displays, design suggestions, tested combinations, and photo galleries to help homeowners see the different colors, finishes, textures, sizes, and shapes available.

In addition to all of these style options, there is also no reason for homeowners to settle for a product that doesn't have a lifetime guarantee on the structural integrity of the product. Your outdoor kitchens, fire pit areas, patios, and walkways will thank you later.

Like with everything else, don't plan your outdoor flooring in silo. The perfect patio paver or natural stone product for your home will accentuate your landscape and the hardscape features you already have installed. It is important to consider how your entire landscape will flow together once your patio is installed. Creating a comprehensive, cohesive design will make all the difference in achieving a stunning finished project.



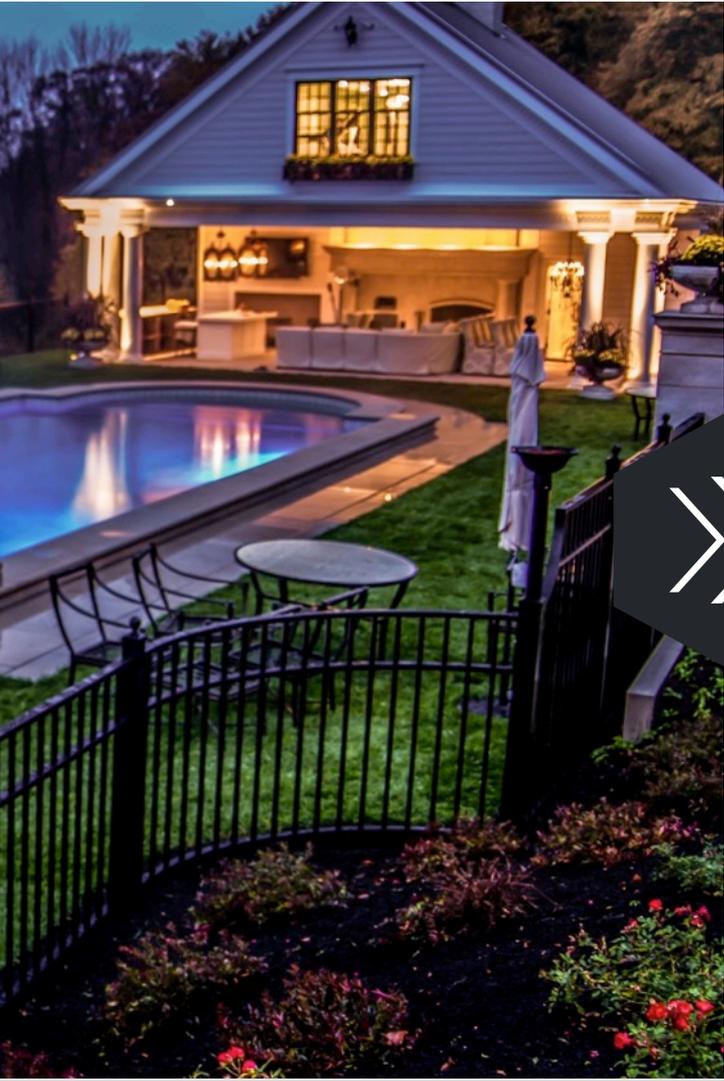


Concrete paver or natural stone?

There are tons of pros and cons for either one. Lets start with the top myth: cost. Generally, natural stone doesn't mean more costs. Today's concrete pavers are very comparable in pricing to natural stone – and that's largely because of the high quality concrete pavers out there. Now on the technical details.

Concrete pavers come in hundreds of colors, sizes, and shapes - and because they're manufactured, they will all be the same (unless your design calls for different ones to create a pattern of course). Natural stone, is, well, natural – so each piece will be unique. Another common reason people choose pavers is due to their durability and maintenance. A proper installation method allows the system to flex and move with freeze/thaw cycles preventing any cracking (be sure to check your landscaper's credentials – as not every installation is correct!). If for some reason, there is cracking in a concrete paver – an easy switch is possible. Natural stone can be more prone to cracking due to damaging freeze/thaw cycles and more complicated to switch depending on the type of installation.

Taking back a step, you don't have to decide between the two – feel free to consider blending natural stone and concrete pavers! Most importantly, start your flooring planning with your design and function goals (e.g. no maintenance, grey color preference, etc.), then choose your material.



Extending the Use of Your Outdoor Spaces

For day and night.

A well planned outdoor space often includes more than just a patio for after a dip in the pool. Special features like outdoor lighting and heaters can help you get more time in the outdoor areas you love.



Adding heat can help solve the top reason people prefer to stay indoors during the spring and fall. Bring this warmth outside by adding a portable patio heater or outdoor fireplace to your pool spaces.

Whether it's a natural stone, stucco, or a stone veneer fireplace, place it near sitting areas so that even when the pool is not in use, comfortable spaces can be enjoyed from the heat.

As for patio heaters, consider these as complementing heat or for slightly cool days. And thanks to the advancements in portable heaters you can choose from a variety of designs and colors that will meet the style you have chosen for your outdoor space.





Plenty of lighting is a huge part of an enjoyable outdoor living space. This can come in the simple form of candles, but for a more long-term solution you can choose hanging string lights, lanterns, walkway lights, and spotlights. Most important, have nearby dining areas well lit to allow your pool patio plenty of use, even after the sunsets (or before sunrise!).

Shade and wind structures range from pergolas and umbrellas to sails and trees. Shade is an important factor for any outdoor space. You should be free to enjoy your space as much in the middle of the day as you do in the evening. For those “hot spots” that you identified in your sitemap planning exercise earlier, a properly placed pergola with shade canopy can make all the difference.

Keep the cooking outside. By building an outdoor kitchen with your cooking preferences in mind, you can create a space where you can prepare and cook food even as you socialize with others. Additionally, your grill area can be customized to meet your cooking needs, budget, and size requirements—perfectly complementing the rest of your landscape design. Add more functionality with a pizza oven, built-in fryer, and other handy cooking appliances!

Add a bar. Keep your guests refreshed and away from your indoor kitchen with a fully functioning outdoor bar. Think fridge, margarita blender, cutting boards (for fruit), and whatever else you enjoy in your drinks!

Keep kids entertained. Encourage your children to be part of the planning and make sure to include activities for them after their done with the pool. Think mini golf, human size chess, and anything else that would keep their interest!

Host the next football game outside. Whether it's built in outdoor tvs or screens, place them near that outdoor fireplace and bar (and outdoor kitchen!) for extra use.





Styling

It's not over until it's colorful.

Once your new space is complete, it's time to make it a true part of your home. Imagine moving into a new house and leaving it empty except for a few pieces of furniture. Wouldn't happen, right? So it shouldn't happen with your backyard patio space either.

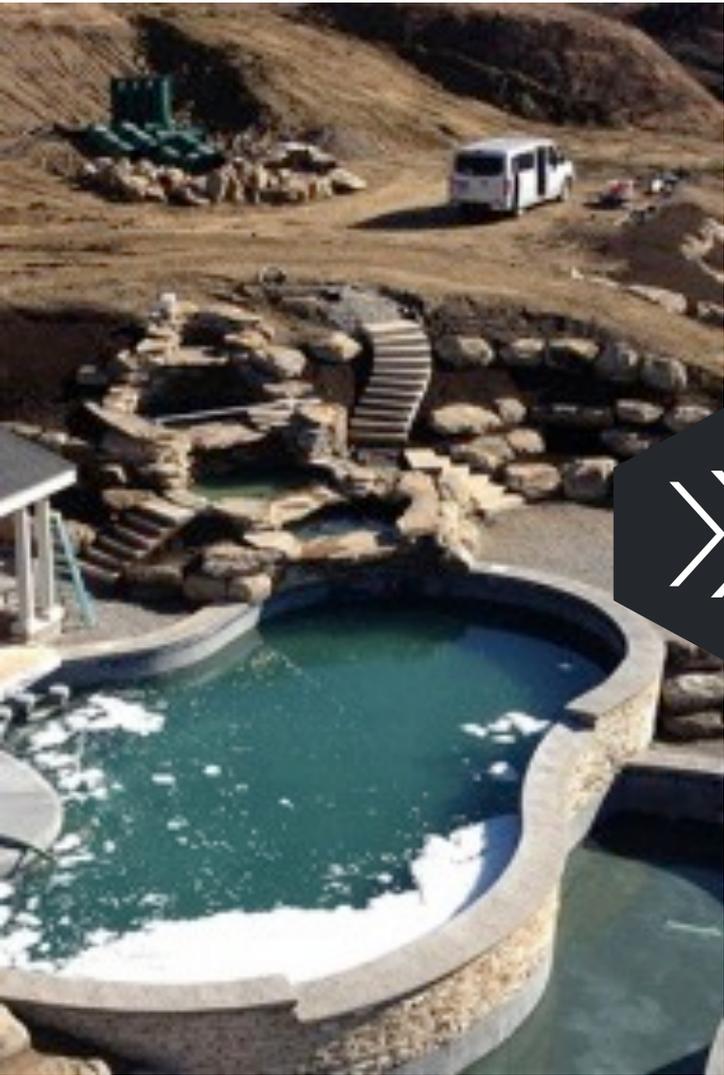


Adding pops of color.

Just like the interior spaces of your home, the outdoor living and landscape spaces need a color scheme. Let's take your new patio for instance. While considering the colors of your natural stone or concrete pavers, add one bold accent color to the soft, muted colors of nature. Introduce this color through outdoor pillows, couch cushions, planters, and even outdoor rugs. Remember, a little goes a long way here!

Texture brings dimension.

One of the best ways to add warmth and class to an outdoor living space is through the careful use of contrasting textures. There are a ton of options in the outdoor fabrics world today for pillows, throws, outdoor curtains, and outdoor rugs. Combine these durable fabrics with woven wicker or wrought iron outdoor furniture and throw in some rough concrete and stone. Top it off with lush plantings and you've got yourself a truly special outdoor space.



Moving Ahead.

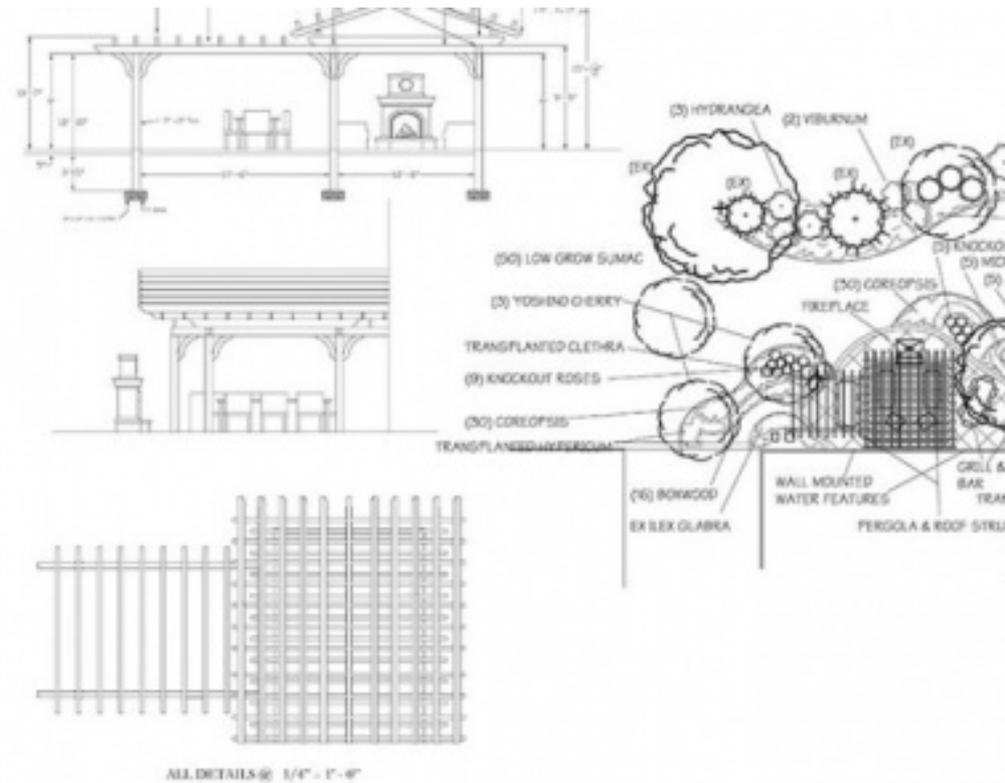
When you're ready.

How much does it cost? Well, here is the spoiler – there is a wide range based on your options! What's important is that you've considered function and beauty, as well as your return on your investment (not just in dollars, but usage, value). Then, pick someone who really understands your goals, someone you get along with.

Picking the right outdoor living design/build professional.

For most landscape and pool patio projects, a qualified landscape design/build firm is the best choice. Consider your new space years down the line – not just the first summer. How will the work hold up? Who stands behind it? This is where you will find the differentiating factor in choosing the best company to work with.

That said, you want to hire a landscape firm that has extensive experience installing custom hardscapes and decking. Check their portfolio of work and be sure to also get references of past and current clients. Important certifications for paving stone and retaining wall installers include ICPI and NCMA, as well as manufacturer certifications like the Unilock Authorized Contractor Program.



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How do I compare estimates and landscaping companies?

When interviewing landscaping companies for your project, you will be faced with the challenge of comparing pricing, details of the design, and proposed quality. It is critical to ensure you are comparing apples to apples throughout this process. 9 times out of 10, if you have 3 estimates in front of you, and one is far lower priced than the others, this contractor is cutting corners and sacrificing the installation quality of your project to win the job. Do not fall into this trap as the price you will pay to repair the project later will far surpass doing it right the first time.

Now to your burning question, how much will it cost?

It really does depend. Here is a starting point, quality concrete pavers (and competing natural stone) start at around \$5/sq.ft. This doesn't include other materials and labor. The key here is to consider the costs now and later – to maintain and to replace if something goes wrong. Remember, by choosing the right landscaping contractor, you're minimizing the maintenance/ replacement needs thanks to proper installation and usage of materials.





Who Are We

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We've been designing, building, and maintaining exceptional interior and exterior living environments which enhance our clients' quality of life since 1972.

The professional team members at Blackwood & Associates are courteous, respectful, and customer-service oriented. We are passionate about exceeding our clients' high expectations.

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