

THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR KITCHEN DESIGN GUIDE FOR ST. LOUIS HOMEOWNERS



INTRODUCTION

Designing your dream outdoor kitchen is an exciting journey, and the first step is creating a vision that suits your style and space. From selecting materials and appliances to choosing layouts and features, every decision shapes a space tailored to your lifestyle.

This guide is crafted to simplify the planning process, offering inspiration and design insights specifically for outdoor kitchens in the St. Louis area. Explore ideas for layouts, materials, and features that align with your aesthetic while ensuring functionality.

This guide provides practical advice and creative inspiration to help you start planning the ultimate outdoor space for cooking, entertaining, and relaxing. Let your vision take center stage and transform your backyard into a stunning extension of your home.



WHY YOUR NEXT BIG UPGRADE SHOULD BE AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN

An outdoor kitchen isn't just a home upgrade—it's a lifestyle transformation. Our free Outdoor Kitchen Design Guide is your key to creating a space that brings family and friends together, extends your living area, and maximizes your enjoyment of St. Louis's beautiful seasons. Imagine hosting unforgettable gatherings, cooking with ease under the open sky, and boosting your property's value—all with the perfect outdoor kitchen. This guide is the first step toward making it happen!

Outdoor kitchens extend your living space and create an environment where people naturally come together to relax and connect. "

- Better Homes & Gardens



ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN

1. Grill: The centerpiece of any outdoor kitchen, perfect for everything from casual BBQs to gourmet meals.
2. Countertops: Durable prep space for food preparation and serving.
3. Storage: Cabinets and drawers to keep utensils, spices, and tools organized and within reach.
4. Sink: A convenient addition for washing hands, prepping food, or cleaning up.
5. Appliances: Expand your options with outdoor-rated refrigerators, pizza ovens, or beverage coolers for ultimate functionality.

Together, these features create a space that's not only practical but also a joy to use for entertaining and everyday cooking.



GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of factors that need to be considered before determining what components will be part of the final design.

- Determine what type of food is being cooked. Is the grill going to be used mainly for grilling/searing meat? Does the cook prefer slow-cooking larger pieces of meat? Are boiling (lobster), smoking, frying, pizza baking, and bread making possibilities? Will the cook be preparing entire meals including appetizers and side dishes?
- What fuel source is preferable/available?
- How many people does the cook generally prepare meals for? How large does the grill need to be and how much prep space will be required?
- Is outdoor refrigeration desired? Wine storage, beer on tap? Refreshment center or bar area? Is a sink/cleanup area required?
- Is ventilation required to eliminate smoke?
- Select appliances made from a durable material so they can stay outside all year. At least 304-grade stainless steel is recommended. Note that each manufacturer's stainless steel may look different when seen side by side due to variations in the material finishing process.



GRILLS: CONVENTIONAL BURNERS

With a conventional gas (natural gas or propane) BBQ grill, food is cooked using convection where the flame heats the air between the heat source and food. It is referred to as convection heating because it is similar to cooking in an oven.

Conventional grills have burners, usually made from a metal (steel, stainless, cast iron, brass) tub with 35 or 40 jets, and will reach a temperature of approximately 450*-600*. It may not get hot enough to sear, and the lid must be kept down to try and maintain a consistent temperature.

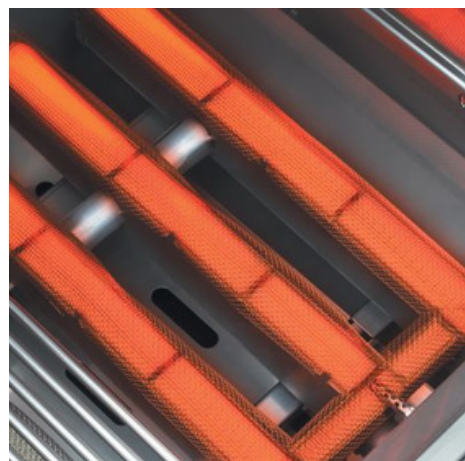
If there is a metal piece between the burner and the grate or ceramic "briquettes," sometimes called a "flavor enhancer" or "flare-up" retarder, the heat at the grate will not reach 600*.



GRILLS: INFRARED BURNERS

Attaining temperature above 600* is important for searing, as meats need to be seared at temperatures of at least 650* and 700* to lock in the flavor and juices. If searing meat and consistent cooking are key concerns, select infrared burners.

With infrared technology, as the burner is heated to a very hot temperature (1250*-1400*), it emits infrared radiation, which cooks food and is independent of the ambient air temperature. Most grill companies sell an infrared burner option in the normal burner position and market them as "sear zones." The ideal sear burners allow the temperature to be varied using knobs the same as on conventional burners. Another option might be to purchase a "sear pod" or separate infrared burner that can be built in alongside the built-in grill. The obvious downside is the chore of transferring all the food from the "sear pod" to the grill to finish off the cooking.



GRILLS: SOCIAL GRILL/COOKTOP

Gathering around a social grill/cooktop enhances the experience of celebrating the simple pleasure of sharing a meal with family and friends. With its circular flattop cooking surface, this grill allows for the preparation of virtually any cuisine from any angle. The grill allows you to sear, saute, grill, stir-fry, and even toast directly on its oil seasoned steel surface. Pots and pans can also be set on it to boil, poach, or steam anything from eggs to lobsters.



GRILLS: KAMADO STYLE GRILLS

Kamado style grills (aka "eggs" because of their shape) provide hours of consistent temperatures ideal for smoking and slow-cooking. They can be electric or fueled by gas, pellets, wood or charcoal, with wood and charcoal generally considered the gold standard. Lump charcoal is preferable; however, briquettes may be used. A special feature might include the ability to add smoking chips without lifting the lid.

Although mainly used for low and slow barbecuing at 225* for smoking, they can also be used for grilling. Grilling temperatures can reach 725* for searing. They are also excellent for cooking pizza.

Key considerations include the ability to regulate the air intake to control the temperature, a tight, thick cooking chamber so the meat will be heated and smoked evenly, and a vent that can be left open during cooking.

The inner firebox walls of a ceramic charcoal smoker stay hotter than a typical steel smoker while maintaining a safe external temperature. The ceramic smoker can reduce charcoal use by 50-75% over regular steel smokers. There has been tremendous advancement in the past few years in egg designs, with many new materials and finishes available with similar performance.



PIZZA OVENS

An outdoor pizza oven is much more than just a pizza oven. Wood-fired pizza ovens have the ability to cook a wide variety of foods to perfection while adding smoky flavors to enhance the culinary experience. They may also be fueled by gas, and some may offer two chambers for cooking.

Pizza ovens combine baking, roasting, and smoking functions that achieve delicious and unique flavor combinations. Outdoor ovens are suitable for cooking all kinds of food such as pizza, roast, turkey, lamb, bread, and pie, and are sure to provide an exceptional entertaining atmosphere.



VENTILATION HOODS

Grill hoods are perfect for keeping smoke from hampering the outdoor experience. Many lanais and pergolas can trap smoke near the chef and the guests; grill hoods will relieve that problem and may even be necessary depending on local building codes, e.g., when under a combustible structure.

Hoods with a depth of at least 32" provide exceptional capture area for barbecue grilling. Grill hood options may include dimmable halogen lights, in-line blowers, dishwasher safe commercial baffle filters, an easy-to-clean stainless steel exterior design that eliminates grease traps, and automatic on/off to prevent overheating.

If the grill is not located near a wall, and building code does not require a hood, consider using a fan or two. In addition to managing the smoke, fans suspended over the roof of a semi-enclosed outdoor kitchen keep the air moving in the outdoor living space and help keep the bugs away.



ADDITIONAL KITCHEN COMPONENTS

Warming Drawers

A warming drawer can heat multiple dishes, and some offer a slow-cook feature for roasting larger cuts of meat. A drawer can also be used for keeping plates or napkins warm. Stainless steel warming drawers designed for built-in installations may include commercial-style handles, humidity control, and an exterior power indicator light that signals when the warming drawer is in use. Warming drawers may also be included in high-end freestanding grills.

Rotisserie

Many grills come equipped with a rotisserie feature, but an add-on kit can be purchased that includes a mounting bracket, stainless steel spit rod, turning forks, electrical cords, and a motor.



ADDITIONAL KITCHEN COMPONENTS

Refrigerators

Refrigerators are available in door and drawer models, many equipped with automatic defrosters and adjustable thermostats. Noncorrodible 304-grade stainless steel is the material of choice, and some models feature a sealed back that protects all electrical components. An outdoor refrigerator should be UL listed for safety. Insulated electrical terminals and a water-resistant thermostat provide high performance in various weather conditions. Be sure the model you select is appropriate for the weather conditions, as well as its location in relation to direct sunlight.

Freezers and Ice Makers

Frost-free freezers generally fit easily under counters while offering a generous storage-capacity. A fully automatic fan-forced cooling system will keep freezer items cold without the worry of defrosting.

Ice makers can be individual units or may also be incorporated into refrigerator units. Self-contained units have storage bins and can produce around 50 lb of ice per day.



ADDITIONAL KITCHEN COMPONENTS

Sinks and Faucets

Adding a sink and faucet to an outdoor kitchen design allows for the preparation of foods and beverages outside. A readily available water source makes it easier to keep the food prep surfaces clean. Sinks are available for either top-mount or under-mount installation, and available features can include a built-in drain and stopper. Sink covers are also available and may be required by local code.

A gooseneck faucet is a popular design for outdoor sinks as it is out of the way and provides ample room for washing dishes and for food preparation. When properly maintained, stainless steel sinks and faucets will keep their luster for many years.

Dishwashers

Outdoor dishwashers are becoming more popular with the expansion of the outdoor entertaining room into a more "indoor/outdoor" space.



ADDITIONAL KITCHEN COMPONENTS

Bartending/Cocktail Stations

Built-in cocktail stations may include an ice bin with stainless steel cover, condiment cups, bottle well for iced bottle storage, sink with cold water, faucet, cutting board, bottle rail, towel bar, and bottle opener and cap catcher.

Beer Coolers/Dispensers

Auto defrost commercial beer dispensers are available that accommodate half, quarter, and mini kegs. A complete tap kit and CO2 tank are included with most models. Freestanding, modified, or built in are all available options.



DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS



BUDGET

Budget and imagination are two factors that greatly influence the overall design for the outdoor space.

Regardless of the size of the budget, it is important to plan out the entire space as part of one cohesive and functional plan, even if the plan is going to be executed in several stages over a number of years. It is critical that all the areas, from dining and cooking, to media and pool areas, harmonize and that traffic flow is well planned.

Once the initial budget is decided upon, itemize all elements that are desired in the space and prioritize based on the budget. If not, everything can be acquired at one time and plan for expansion at a later date. Check local codes for design limitations.



LOCATION

Local Codes and Permits

- What permits are required and how long do they typically take to secure?
- Seek the advice of a building inspector and check the local codes for regulations on burying electric cable and gas lines. The geographic location will determine whether the two lines must be separated trenches or whether they can be separated within the same trench.
- Check local building and fire safety codes for restrictions on the size and location of the kitchen and for the clearance requirements between an open flame and a combustible surface.

Expansion and Portability

- Is the kitchen going to be a permanent structure or designed with portability and flexibility in mind?
- Design now for items that may be added at a later date



LOCATION

Seasonal Use/Frequency/Weather and Wind Patterns

- Is the space going to be used year-round or just for a couple of months?
- How weather resistant do all the design elements need to be?
- The design should take into account hot and cold weather extremes and include shelter from wind, rain, and sun exposure as necessary.
- Prevailing wind patterns will also determine grill placement to prevent smoke from filling the home or blowing into outdoor seating areas or the neighbor's yard.

Incorporating Existing Patio/Deck Area

- Are there existing patios or deck structures that are going to be incorporated into the design?
- Do they require leveling or structural reinforcement?



KITCHEN LAYOUTS

The kitchen layout will depend on a number of factors including the space allocated, the various elements and spaces chosen to be a part of the overall design, and the desired traffic flow both between these elements and the existing home.

Although there are limitless design possibilities, the three most common kitchen layout designs for an outdoor kitchen are:

- galley
- L-shaped
- U-shaped



KITCHEN LAYOUTS

Galley Layout

A galley kitchen is the most basic layout but can incorporate large expansive living spaces. This type of layout is often located along a wall or fence and sometimes will have a parallel island feature. The galley island will typically include a grill, counter and storage space, refreshment centers, and seating. Depending on orientation, the cook may feel isolated from the rest of the crowd. This layout is usually selected by the occasional cook

L-Shaped Layout

An L-shaped kitchen layout generally has more space for both cooking and for food preparation and is ideal for the more frequent outdoor cook. This layout usually accommodates a grill, some under-counter storage, and possibly another cooking appliance on one side, while the adjacent side has counter space and possibly a sink and/or beverage area. This layout allows the cook to be more involved with guests and for multiple persons to be in the cooking and food preparation areas.

U-Shaped Layout

A U-shaped kitchen layout is ideal for providing distinct areas for cooking, food preparation, and even dining, and is the most common for the outdoor cooking enthusiast or professional. The design limits the traffic around the grill area, and food can be served directly from the grill to the dining area, keeping the cook and the guests interacting. This type of design allows for the inclusion of more elements and accessories such as side burners, smokers, warming drawers, etc.

FUNCTIONAL ZONES

A kitchen can encompass many activities: cooking, food preparation, plating and serving, eating, cleanup, and storing. Which activities will be done inside and which outside?

How many people will be doing these activities at once? Is the cook part of the party?

Just as with interior design, the elements of the outdoor work triangle - the cooking area, food storage area, and cleanup area - should each be at a point in the triangle, which allows multiple people to work efficiently within the space.

Functional zones must all work together and be adequately spaced apart for efficiency. Types of zones include:

- Dry Zone: Preparation/Serve
 - near the cooking area
 - close to guests
 - may include warming drawers, garnish center, social grill
- Wet Zone: Preparation/Serve
 - usually near cooking area
 - transfer food quickly to grills
 - may include sink, trash bin, cutting board
- Hot Zone: Cooking
 - cooking applications like grills, burners, drawers
 - ventilation
 - fuel tanks
 - storage
- Cold Zone: Refrigerator
 - away from cooking and heat
 - may include refrigerator, ice machines, blenders, dispensers

SAFETY

To truly enjoy everything the outdoor kitchen and living areas have to offer, be sure proper safety measures are taken.

- Make sure the gas shutoff and a fire extinguisher are easily accessible.
- Keep a first-aid kit on hand.
- Ensure the grill is located a safe distance from the house (refer to local code) and not too close to the dining area to restrict movement between the cooking area and the rest of the yard.
- Make sure the grill isn't too close to windows and doors, to avoid the house filling with smoke while cooking.
- To avoid attracting insects and wildlife, choose materials and appliances that are easy to clean, and empty trash bins.
- Provide safety lighting along paths and steps and task lighting over cooking areas.
- Flooring surfaces should be slip resistant when wet or greasy.

HEATING/COOLING

Adding heating elements to the outdoor space extends the time it can be used, creates a warm inviting atmosphere, and can provide a focal point in a gathering area. Fireplaces and fire pits can be either portable or permanent features and can be fueled by coal, wood, gas, or bioethanol. They are a natural way to heat up the gathering of your outdoor living area. Manufacturers of such appliances will have clearance requirements between the pit/fireplace and any nearby structure.

Patio heaters are another option and are available in natural gas, propane, or electric versions. Units can be freestanding or post or eave mounted.

When cooling the area is the goal, fans - either floor or ceiling mounted - provide a nice cooling effect and can help control bugs and smoke. For areas with relatively low humidity, another cooling option is a mister. Mist contacts the air and skin, and as the water evaporates, it lowers air and skin temperatures.



SHELTER

An overhead structure provides shade and protection and can accommodate ceiling fans, conceal lighting fixtures, minimize infiltration of leaves, and be an architectural design feature providing a focal point. The shelter should fit in with the design of the house and other exterior elements, such as fencing. Building codes may limit size and location.

Umbrellas, the least expensive shelter option, can be either freestanding, or incorporated into a dining set or kitchen island. They can have center posts or swing arms and can even be hung from an overhead structure.

An awning is a shelter attached to the exterior of a building. It can be made of fabric, vinyl laminated fabric, and even aluminum. Because they can be retracted, they offer versatility. Keep in mind that some fabrics are combustible and therefore not suitable for use over a grill.



SHELTER

Pergolas add architectural sophistication, can be permanent or freestanding, and provide shade to cooking or seating areas. Vertical posts support crossbeams, and sometimes an open lattice roof is added, especially if using climbing plants as part of the design. They are typically constructed of wood but can also be found in aluminum and vinyl, which are easier to maintain. When the design includes a closed roof, it is referred to as a ramada.

Another option is a pavilion roof structure in which the roof is hipped equally on all sides. Typically, the roof is closed on these types of structures, and they are designed to handle a snow load to provide better usability of the entertainment space in the winter in colder climates.



ST. LOUIS WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR OUTDOOR KITCHEN

1. Durable Materials:

- Stainless Steel: Highly resistant to humidity and rain, making it ideal for grills, appliances, and cabinetry.
- Stone or Concrete Countertops: These materials are not only durable but can withstand temperature fluctuations without warping or cracking.
- Teak or Ipe Wood: Naturally resistant to moisture and decay, these woods are perfect for outdoor furniture and accents.

2. Weatherproof Storage:

- Invest in sealed, weather-resistant storage options to protect utensils, tools, and accessories from moisture.
- Look for covers for grills, sinks, and counters to prevent damage during heavy rain or snow.

3. Seasonal Use Tips:

- Winter: Consider installing removable or retractable covers for grills and sinks, and be sure to store smaller appliances indoors during extreme cold.
- Summer: Ensure proper ventilation and shade for comfort during hot, humid days. A pergola or awning can provide relief, keeping your kitchen cool and dry.

By choosing the right materials and planning for the seasons, you can enjoy your outdoor kitchen year-round while protecting it from the St. Louis climate.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Masonry, Stucco, and Brick

Pros

- Resistant to weather effects and the elements
- Provides a substantial “built-in” look

Cons

- Labor intensive to build on site
- Not as easily installed as other cabinet types
- There may be wasted interior space
- Heavy, out-of-place look in outdoor living rooms and on decks
- Exterior materials/veneers must be purchased in addition to the skeleton structure of the cabinets/island and actual cabinet components
- Less “ready-made” than other types of outdoor kitchens



Cabinetry-Based Kitchens: HDPE, Wood

HDPE/Polymer

Pros

- Easy to clean - can be hosed down
- No corrosion concerns provided attaching hardware is corrosion resistant
- Material is impervious to water/moisture
- Stain resistant

Cons

- Limited range of color options
- Few types have the same rich look as wood
- Not very eco-friendly since it's made from petrochemicals
- Needs stainless insulating sleeve because the material is combustible
- Moves with temperature change causing bowing and rigidity issues over time



Cabinetry-Based Kitchens: HDPE, Wood

Wood

Pros

- Has a warm look similar to wood indoor cabinets
- Wood grain provides visual detail not found in polymer cabinets

Cons

- Can fade depending on the type of wood and finish treatment
- Requires regular maintenance to retain look
- The harsher the climate, the faster the wood fails
- Wood ultimately can break down over time, but this time span is governed by the type of wood, surface treatments, and how well it is cared for



Cabinetry-Based Kitchens: Stainless Steel

Pros

- Optional powder coat finishes offer color or the realistic look of wood
- Traditional metal cabinetry in noncorrosive stainless steel, with proper care
- Fire, heat and impact resistant
- Long-term value when the total life cycle costs are considered
- Matches many stainless steel outdoor appliances and gas grills for uniform look
- Modern/attractive appearance
- Easy to keep clean from fingerprints etc., especially if coated with a protective finish

Cons

- May get hot when exposed to direct sunlight



Stainless Steel: Finishes

Even the most discriminating homeowner can be satisfied with the broad palette of colored powder coat finishes available for stainless steel cabinetry. Whether designing an outdoor living area to blend in with the landscaping or patio furniture, or continuing an interior theme to the outdoors, manufacturers offer palettes of color with unlimited opportunities. These colors, applied through a powder coat finishing process, protect stainless steel cabinets from harsh chemicals such as chlorine, salt from the ocean, and muriatic acid - creating a virtually maintenance-free finish in any weather environment.

As pictured in the samples below, a variety of colors and finish options, from metallic to hammertone looks, are available. Some manufacturers may even offer custom colors, realistic wood grain, or metallic hues.



Stainless Steel: Finishes

The variety of rich powder coat finishes will make an outdoor kitchen feel more like an outdoor living area, and less like a traditional barbecue. Enjoy the look and warmth of wood without the maintenance by choosing a wood grain powder coat finish. The finishes pictured here are representative of the extremely realistic wood species available. They are applied and adhere directly on the stainless steel. Wood grain options can be used in the door finish or a door insert, offering the beauty of wood with the durability of stainless steel.



Stainless Steel: Door Styles

Stainless steel outdoor cabinetry offers a variety of door styles to match your aesthetic and functional needs:

1. Flat Panel: Sleek and modern, this minimalist style complements contemporary outdoor kitchen designs.
2. Shaker Style: Featuring a clean, framed look, shaker doors add a touch of classic elegance while maintaining durability.
3. Louvered: Ventilated panels that provide airflow, ideal for humid climates to prevent moisture buildup.
4. Glass Inserts: For a sophisticated touch, frosted or clear glass inserts add visibility and style to your cabinets.
5. Beadboard: A timeless option with textured panels, perfect for a cozy or traditional outdoor space.

These door styles not only enhance the look of your outdoor kitchen but also provide durability and weather resistance, ensuring long-lasting performance.



Stainless Steel: Finishes

Here is a five-piece Shaker style door with one of a wide variety of designer finishes - a tinted glass center panel. These insert options are used to add a little extra glitz and glamour to the doors.

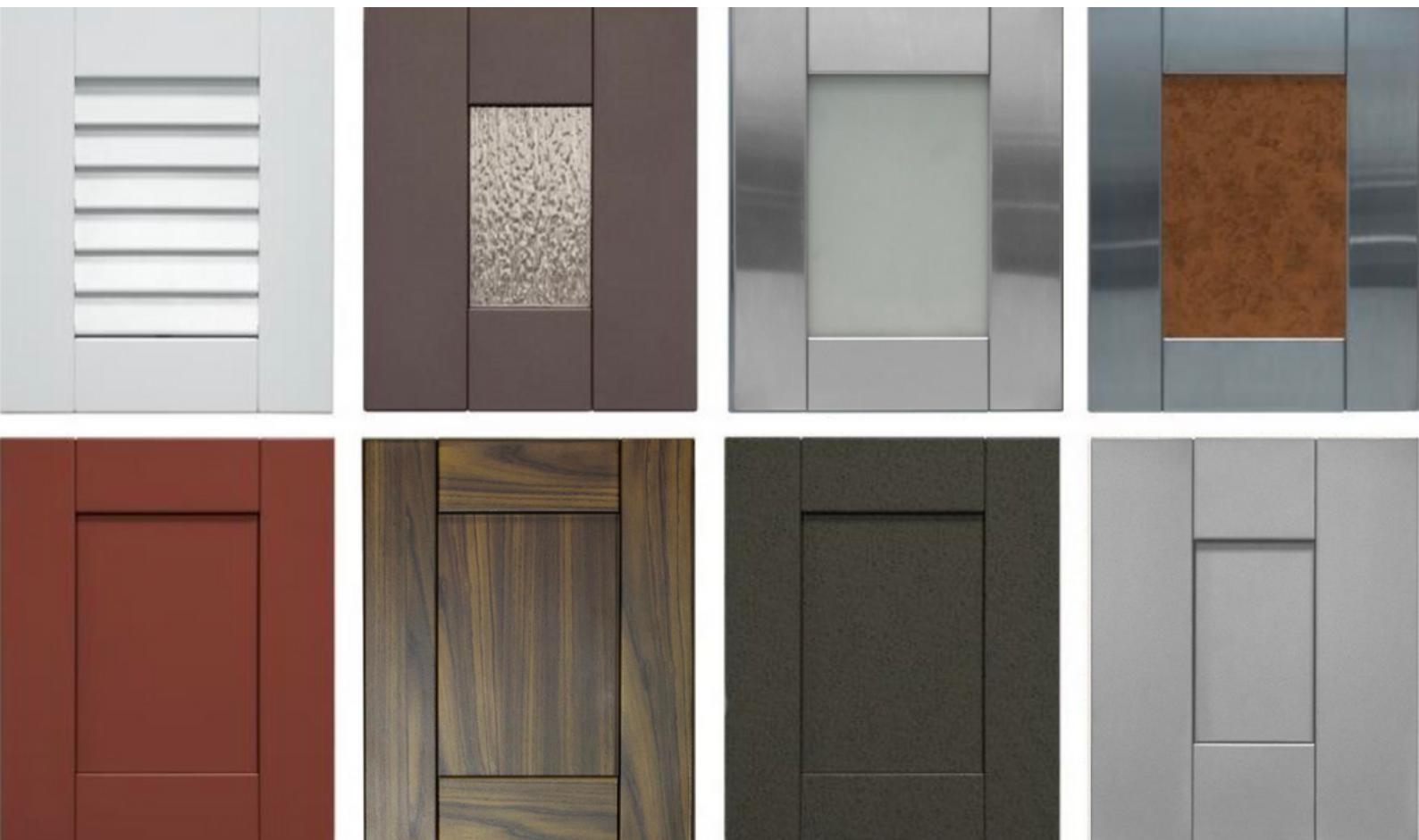
If the desire is to maintain the clean, contemporary look of stainless steel with better resistance to corrosion, marine-grade stainless (316) should be specified. While resistance to corrosion is higher than 304 stainless, it still must be maintained periodically.



Stainless Steel: Door Styles

Outdoor stainless steel cabinetry can be adapted to fit with any decorating scheme. Manufacturers offer several door and drawer styles, both solid and open for glass or metal inserts.

As stated, the fronts can be painted in powder coat from a seemingly endless palette of colors, or the realistic wood grain option can be used for the entire door surface or as an insert into a "frame-only" door. The durability of the painted wood grain applied to the fronts of stainless steel cabinets is becoming increasingly popular for outdoor kitchens, eliminating the need to maintain real wood.



General Considerations

- Adjustable Legs: Adjust their vertical position to accomodate ground variations
- Toe-kick options: Toe kicks cover the legs under the cabinets for a more finished appearance
- Exterior Trim Details: As a personal preference item, trim details offer more visual detail to dress up the cabinets
- Optional Accessibility Features: Roll-out trash bins and trays make using them a lot more convenient
- Quality hardware: Door hinges, drawer slides, connection pins and/or screws, handles and similar items should be made from quality materials that are also not affected by the elements. Stainless steel hinges and drawer slides or other noncorrosive materials are important to have.
- Durable Construction: Look for durability in the design and materials of the cabinets such as polymer cabinets made with 3/4" thick boxes and shelves or grades of stainless steel that offer better rigidity and resistance to denting.

Your Dream Outdoor Kitchen Awaits

Creating the perfect outdoor kitchen is more than just a project—it's an opportunity to transform your backyard into a space for unforgettable moments. From selecting the right materials to incorporating stylish and functional features, every decision brings you closer to a space that reflects your personality and enhances your lifestyle.

This guide has equipped you with the knowledge and inspiration to design an outdoor kitchen that meets your needs and exceeds your expectations. Whether you're envisioning a cozy family retreat or an entertainer's paradise, the possibilities are endless.

Now it's time to take the next step—turn your vision into reality. Partner with experienced professionals, explore innovative design options, and start planning the outdoor kitchen of your dreams. Your perfect space is just around the corner!

