

The Backyard Oasis

By Mark S. Bourque
Prudential Premier Properties

Today's prospective homebuyers are increasingly interested in a property's outdoor living space as they are its interior. Savvy agents understand this powerful trend and are staging homes on two fronts – the terrific indoors and the great outdoors.

The following tips will help ensure that your backyard is as distinctive at your home itself.

- **Make your Backyard Homey:** Create a conversation area with some furniture. The area needn't be elaborate; just two chairs pulled close together with a table between can make even the most basic concrete patio special. Just the idea that an outdoor eating option is possible makes a property more inviting. Adding accessories like a small table, an inexpensive outdoor rug or a few pots filled with flowers will make the area even more attractive.
- **Remember the Kids:** If you have an old tree house, fix it up and paint it bright colors or add sporty designs that will make other kids fall in love with it. Just make sure the tree house is safe. Add a tire swing to a tree and keep an orderly basket of balls, flying disks and a jump rope so kids dragged along on the showing can play in the yard. Swing sets that are old and unsightly should be removed or refurbished to look new.

- **Fire is Hot:** There's nothing like sitting around a fire and enjoying the company of friends and loved ones, which explains the growing popularity of fire pits and outdoor hearths. Few home improvements create the "wow" factor that a backyard fireplace will, and many homeowners are adding a fireplace to their outdoor landscape to recreate all the appeal of their home's interior outside in the backyard.
- **Simple Fixes:** You needn't go overboard with the changes in your yard. Sometimes, the easiest fixes will create a look that people will remember. Do a thorough inspection and replace any damaged boards on your deck or fence, and apply a fresh coat of paint, stain and sealant if the finish requires it. You should also weed and groom your garden and add some perennials for color.

Creating a backyard sanctuary is one of the smartest things you can do to make your home stand out, so make your outdoor space a destination to remember.

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