



fire & water

They're the hottest and coolest backyard add-ons—a fire feature to warm you and a waterfall to keep things cool. **By Lauren Payne**

HOT STUFF

We all have fond memories of sitting around a campfire. The sing-alongs, the 'smores, the smell of wood smoke. You say your days of roughing it are behind you? Fear not! Now you can have a campfire in the comfort of your own backyard. And the latest

fire features are more attractive and easier to use than ever.

Gas-assisted fire pits and fireplaces are the new norm, says Mitch Knapp of Haskell-based Scenic Landscaping. With gas-assist, you simply push a button and a gush of flame ignites the wood, eliminating the need for kindling. "You turn off the gas as soon as the

wood is lit and continue to feed it more wood," says Knapp. "You get the smell of the burning wood without the hassle of kindling."

WHAT'S TRENDING?

Fire pits filled with crushed glass or volcanic rock. "These heat up and glow," Knapp says, "but there's no wood at all. It's the lazy man's fire pit—you turn a switch and

get the warmth and the flame." Knapp's firm often designs this style of fire pit with an oversize surround, transforming it into a table. "You can put your drink on it or your feet up," he says.

Linear fire features are winning over those with ultra modern tastes. "We build them into a wall," says Richard Zimmer, a landscape architect with

Tapestry Landscape Architecture, Scenic's design division.

WHAT'S THE COST?

That depends on the scope of the project. A custom-built fire pit starts around \$5,000, including running the gas line. A fireplace can go as high as \$40,000, depending on features, such as built-in benches and wood-storage



CLIMATE CONTROL 1. Scenic Landscaping's linear fireplace adds drama to this spa-like space. 2. A custom-built fireplace, also by Scenic, lengthens the outdoor-living season. 3. This volcanic-rock, gas-fed fire pit created by Reynolds Landscaping heats up instantly; no wood required. 4. Scenic's circular, gas-run fire pit has a wide fieldstone cap, the perfect spot for resting a drink. 5. Madlinger Exterior Design's free-form, rustic waterfall spills into the pond below. 6. A naturally landscaped stone waterfall by Reynolds Landscaping.

cubbies. Fireplaces must conform with local code. "They all require substantial concrete footings and a venting system," Knapp says.

WHAT ELSE?

If you want a wood-burning option, Knapp recommends staying away from fresh-cut wood. Use seasoned or kiln-dried wood instead. "It burns beautifully," he says.

RESOURCES: Mitch Knapp, owner of Scenic Landscaping (the build division) and Scenic Landscaping and Tapestry Architecture (the design division) and Richard Zimmer, landscape architect at Tapestry Landscape Architecture based in Haskell, 973-435-0589; Sceniclandscaping.com.

COOL FALLS

There's something calming about the sight and sound of water splashing gently into a rocky pond. Beautifully landscaped water features are charming, too, and require only moderate maintenance.

WHAT'S TRENDING?

Pond-less waterfalls. It's a simple idea, says Branchburg-based landscape designer Drew Madlinger. Rather than spilling into a pond or pool, the water pours directly into the ground. "Pond-less waterfalls are ideal for a homeowner

who wants the calming sound of water but is not so interested in fish or plant life," Madlinger says. "They're also great for tight spaces and for families with small children." A pond-less waterfall still requires excavation—generally the hole is deeper than a pond—but then it's filled with stones and covered with grass or even a deck or patio. It tends to be a streamlined, more modern look, he says.

Most water features require no major maintenance, Madlinger says, but there are a few things to consider. First, select the location carefully. You don't want your pond under a tree,

since leaf litter will increase the PH of the water. On the other hand, a sunnier location will warm the water, which is likely to increase algae. "Cooler temperatures keep the water clearer," Madlinger says.

He suggests an auto-flow irrigation system to keep the water level consistent and to circulate the water. Alternatively, you can fill the pond every so often with a garden hose. "There will be evaporation in summer," he warns, "but normal rainfall will keep the water level up."

WHAT'S THE COST?

Water features run the gamut. A smaller, pond-less waterfall costs around \$3,500 to \$4,000, says Madlinger. Larger, more rustic

waterfalls with boulders and streams range from \$12,000 to \$15,000. "A rustic-pond water feature tends to be more expensive," he says, "since there's more plantings and more lighting. A formal, pond-less water feature is more cut and dried, with minimal plantings and not so much lighting. There's less cost."

WHAT ELSE?

If you have a dog, Madlinger warns against installing a pond with a rubber liner. Invest in a hard basin instead. "If the dog goes into the pond, he can scratch around and cause a leak," he says. "It's fixable, but it can be costly to repair."

RESOURCE: Drew Madlinger, Madlinger Exterior Design, Branchburg; 908-203-0080, madlingerexteriordesign.com.