

Outdoor Fireplaces Made Easy

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If there is one thing that we're known for along the Central Coast, it is cool evenings and even colder nights. One of the fastest growing backyard accessories to address this fact is the outdoor fireplace. In this short piece, we'll talk about planning, options, install and upkeep of such an incredible feature.

A fireplace installed in your yard is almost sure to double the amount of time you will spend entertaining outdoors. One of the most important questions you can ask yourself is where to place it. I always recommend a space out of the prevailing wind. The exhaust from the fireplace can get hot and you will want to make sure it is away from anything that could catch fire. You may consider contacting your local building department for clarification on any restrictions on installation in your area. I advise a space for at least (4) people and a nearby gas line is always a plus if you choose gas over wood. If starting from scratch, see if you can build electricity and even speaker wire.

A well fueled fireplace puts on a good show. In most cases, a gas log set is the best way to go. I can get my fireplace started in seconds while traditional wood can take 20 minutes or more. If a gas line is not an option, you can even consider connection to a propane tank. If you are going to go traditional with burning wood, remember space for storing firewood.

Twenty years ago, most outdoor fire places were built using traditional masonry construction that is both costly and time consuming. Today, we have fireplace "kits" that have changed the business. A fireplace kit amounts to less material, less cost and less work on the installation. My favorite manufacturer is Forno Bravo. They sell a kit that can be purchased at your local landscape supply and fits on a pallet.

Installing a fireplace kit is a two-man job and can be completed in one day. The kit consists of a base, firebox, throat, smoke box and chimney. Each piece is numbered and fits together using a special high temperature / waterproof mortar. Once in place, it is up to you to finish it with stone, stucco or even tile. I tell folks that one of the most important details to successful construction is a level and well supported foundation.

Once your fireplace is installed, you should not need to harden off or prepare it in any way. While it is rated for high temperatures, I always caution folks against over-firing it. I never recommend any sort of liquid fuel and always recommend against using water to extinguish a fire in an outdoor fireplace. When it comes to cleaning, you should hire a

professional chimney sweep if you have any doubts about your ability. In most cases, a steel brush may be used on the spark arrestor and flue twice a year depending on how often you use it.

Outdoor living is my number one reason for choosing the Central Coast to call home. Features like outdoor fireplaces will add both beauty and value to your home. Should you wish to consider ways you can get more out of your landscape, stop by your favorite landscape supply and learn about some of your options.

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Steve McShane Biography (Revised 2-18)

Steve McShane is Owner & General Manager of McShane's Landscape Supply on Hwy. 68 in Salinas. He has a B.S. in Soil Science from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and an M.B.A. from Santa Clara. When not working, he loves hiking & gardening. He can be reached at steve@mcshaneslandscape.com.