

## Outdoor Kitchens; A Sizzling New Trend

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The stock market is unsteady, new housing development has slowed down, and real estate sales are at a lull. The general public has trended towards spending more time and vacations at home therefore they are putting the money saved for expensive trips to the Caribbean back into their homes. Outdoor kitchens of all shapes and sizes have become one of the hottest trends in outdoor living spaces and contractors are challenged with meeting the demands of dream driven home owners looking to top the neighbors next door. Outdoor kitchens take the contractors construction and design skills to the next level and create opportunities with clientele in need of bigger and more elaborate projects.

As a Contractor Service Representative for EP Henry, I am often called for on site technical assistance with some of these elaborate outdoor kitchen projects that contractors are installing with their hardscape projects today. In most cases, I am able to assist the contractor with two site visits. The first visit usually occurs in the contractor's office over a set of details for the kitchen appliances and some graph paper. The second visit occurs on site during the construction of the outdoor kitchen. The most important phase of these projects takes place in the planning stage.

The contractor must conduct a very detailed interview with their client during their initial appointment to design and plan a successful project. The contractor must determine the appliances that will become part of the outdoor kitchen to the specifics of what brand will be used. A set of drawings that indicate all the dimensions of the appliances is pertinent to the size, cost, and construction of the outdoor kitchen. A project that includes a grill, sink, and refrigerator will require the installation of electric, hot and cold water, sewer, and natural gas. Licensed plumbers and electricians will be needed as sub-contractors to obtain permits from the local municipality and provide final connections to the appliances. A savvy contractor typically has the equipment means and skill level to trench and install the supply lines for these utilities and can save labor costs with sub-contractors. The remaining installation phases of the outdoor kitchen fall within most contractors comfort level, the actual construction of the project.

The planning is complete, permits have been obtained, and sub-contractors are scheduled. The project must be painted out to its true dimensions and approved by your client. The utilities must be installed and located within the dimensions of the project. It is now time to begin construction of the walls that will support the appliances. The most difficult part of this phase is allocating the correct amount of space for the appliances and making sure the elevations course out evenly for the countertop application. A contractor might also find difficulty in supporting the appliance units within the structure. While many contractors simply stack block to support the back of a grill or side burner, I recommend using 3/8" flat stock steel. The flat stock steel will save you storage space under the kitchen and will also save you money in your materials. The final phase of construction is the countertop installation. I have seen many products used for countertops including, pavers, wall caps, natural bluestone, Devonstone, and granite. I recommend that any contractor that is using granite for a countertop let their client purchase the granite and allow the granite company to template and install the countertop.

While I realize more construction details are associated with these elaborate outdoor kitchens it is difficult to fit them all into a newsletter. If you find yourself installing your first outdoor kitchen project with EP Henry product and need assistance, please pick up the phone and give me a call, I would be more than glad to meet you on site, after all, it is a service that comes with the product.