

OUTDOOR LIVING

Top picks for the garden

With sunny days and long evenings beckoning, **Andy Sharman** picks his 10 best outdoor-living essentials



Firebowl

If you've ever looked at the sumptuous pages of a Toast catalogue and fancied stepping right into its pages, then here's your chance. The rustic Toast firebowl, hand-wrought from mild steel, will provide the perfect campfire at dusk, and, with a diameter of just 61cm, it's perfect for smaller urban dwellings. With its removable grill, it even makes for a handy little barbecue. We're told that the steel will discolour and that over time, the surface will rust, which will, of course, only add to its shabby-chic charm.

Where from: Toast (0844-557 5200; www.toast.co.uk)

How much: £99

Kookaburra sail shade

The British sun seems to get stronger each year - so it's high time to invest in a garden canopy. Woven using high-density polyester, this sun-shade blocks out more than 99 per cent of harmful UV rays. The shades are available in five tasteful colours and can be attached to walls, trees, fences, posts, you name it - so they will adapt to most garden scenarios. What's more, it's machine-washable and waterproof: just what you need to survive the capricious British summer.

Where from: Primrose London (0870 499 0220; www.primrose-london.co.uk)

How much: from £29.95



Vertical planters

The Wiltshire-based garden designer Amrit Row has sourced these vertical planters, made from the offcuts of pipes used by local utilities companies. The bright industrial tubes are just the thing for growing fruit and veg, and provide the ideal solution for cramped urban dwellings and chic country piles alike. The 2 metre-long pipes are lined with a geo-textile insert to stop soil from escaping. Simply bury the pipes 2ft down, slit the lining and start poking through your seedlings. You could be enjoying your own lettuce, rocket and strawberries in no time. And what better time to take on some much needed self-sufficiency?

Where from: Spacemagic Garden Design (01225 867 971; www.spacemagicgarden.co.uk)

How much: £120

Dickenson tablecloth

Question: What's the difference between a picnic lunch on a grubby park bench and a refined outdoor dining experience? Answer: this beautiful Dickenson tablecloth by the Kings Road store Designers Guild. Set on white cloth with checks of celadon, turquoise and graphite black, this woven throw, made from 100 per cent cotton, will bring an elegant air to your outdoor fare.

Where from: Designers Guild (020-7893 7400; www.designersguild.com)

How much: from £75

Picnic beakers and bowls

Made from tough old melamine, these beakers and bowls are virtually unbreakable - so, ideal for that day-long barbecue with children. The crockery is the latest offering from the Notting Hill store Pedlars, whose eclectic collection ranges from the classic to the quirky. Both elements meet in these picnic cups and bowls. The beakers are based on the French classic Duralex Picardie, so they'll fit nicely in your designer Royal

VKB carafe

(see below).

Where from: Pedlars

(01330 850400;

www.pedlars.co.uk)

How much: beakers

£2.95; bowls £7.95



Hurricane lamp

Great for summer evenings, this lamp is made of tinned metal and sold by those old-time charmers Labour and Wait. The lantern, which runs on paraffin or lamp oil, has been made by the German company Feuerhand for almost a century. It's ideal for outdoor use, as it has been hot-tinned to protect against rust.

Where from: Labour and Wait (020-7729 6253; www.labourandwait.co.uk)

How much: £16



Recycled pure wool blanket

These homely blankets are made from so-called shoddy wool: the material left over from the production of virgin wool blankets. It's just what you'd expect from the small, independent, Thame-based Hen & Hammock, which offers a well-curated selection of attractive, sustainable products for the home and garden. In multi-coloured checks, the picnic blankets are ideal for laying on the grass or wrapping up in as the evening draws in. Each 150cm-by-120cm blanket is unique, with its own chequered colour combination of soft pinks, greens, oatmeal browns and blues.

Where from: Hen & Hammock (01844 217060; www.henandhammock.co.uk)

How much: £20

Zeno table and chairs

This solid oak foldaway table and four chairs defies logic with its ingenious, Russian-doll design. When packed away, it looks like a pared-down version of the classic Alvar Aalto tea trolley. But hidden among its square edges and oiled, wooden slats are four functional dining chairs. It's great for small gardens and balconies. Just remember to store it away at the end of the evening, as it's suitable for dry conditions only.

Where from: Habitat (08444 991111; www.habitat.co.uk)

How much: £319.20



Carafe

Created by acclaimed Dutch design duo Kaptein Roodnat, this Royal VKB carafe takes as its model the legendary French Duralex "Picardie" glass, which (when bought separately) can be stacked in the throat of the carafe. The decanter is part of the "Holiday at Home" range from The Conran Shop, which highlights the joys of time spent at home as a fun, eco, and cheap alternative to holidays abroad - all with a Sixties bohemian flavour.

Where from: The Conran Shop (0844-848 4000; www.conranshop.co.uk)

How much: £8.95



Stripey hammock chair

After all that hosting and toasting, you might want to curl up, put your head in a good book and doze off in the shade. For this, the Stripey Hammock Chair from Graham and Green is perfect. And if you're worried about the lack of exotic palm trees to hang it from, the Graham and Green rope fitting and power hook (not included) will allow you to fix it to any sturdy overhead construction.

Where from: Graham and Green (0845-130 6622; www.grahamandgreen.co.uk)

How much: £87

