

Midwest Living

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The Joys of Summer!

Easy, delicious grilling • Top towns for antiques
A great lake escape • Secrets for perfect cookies



1 Seat creatively. For a sit-down meal, bring out indoor furniture. Surround a table with a mix of chairs or benches (left). Or take cues from a picnic for a casual party. Spread blankets and pillows throughout the yard. Set a basket of simple eats and a bucket of cold drinks on each blanket, suggests Michigan native Katie Brown, author of *Katie Brown's Outdoor Entertaining*.

more shade, make a canopy by tying muslin to tree branches. If it's a chilly evening, supply shawls cut from inexpensive fabrics. "It's as if you had an outdoor concierge for your party," Katie says. "I try to think of what a great hotel would have for you, especially when dealing with weather."

4 Spread out snacks. Encourage guests to walk around and mingle by setting up food and drink stations. Try a fruit buffet, appetizer table or lemonade stand.

5 Set the mood with music. Create a themed playlist, and take speakers outside. Play '20s music for a *Great Gatsby* lawn party. "Ask everyone to wear white and provide lawn games, such as croquet and badminton," Laura says. For a laid-back

beach party, try a reggae mix. Complement a formal dinner with jazz.

6 De-bug the yard. Coat the yard with garlic spray or natural bug spray—instead of harsh chemicals—three days before and the morning of an event, Laura advises. Do it yourself for \$30 (if you own a bug fogger), or hire someone for a couple hundred. Set up a bug-spray station at the party.

7 Re-create park games. Instead of a giant outdoor chess set, design a tic-tac-toe board, Katie says. Make a grid with rope. Secure with stakes. Use rocks as the Os and sticks as the Xs.

8 Spotlight the party. Hang lanterns or twinkle lights in trees to create intimate evening lighting. Line walkways with luminarias. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS: HELEN NORMAN

Give your party a breath of fresh air

Entertaining pros share their secrets for elevating the usual backyard barbecue into a memorable outdoor affair.

2 Go "heavy" on the decor. For a wind-proof tabletop with style, use your indoor dinnerware (left) or rent from a party store, suggests Minneapolis event planner Laura Mullen. "Heavy plateware instantly classes up everything for little expense," she says. (Rent plates for 30–70 cents each.) Instead of one centerpiece, line up weighted pots of flowers (right). Chalk names on river rocks as place cards, and clip on tablecloth weights.

3 Offer clever comforts. Provide buckets of dollar-store sunglasses, bottles of sunscreen or floppy hats to combat the sun. For

