

# Barbecues and patio heaters

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Barbecues and patio heaters can both enhance outdoor living in the garden. Our advice will help you choose well and use them safely.

## Choosing a barbecue

The model you choose will depend on how many people you want to cater for, what you'll cook, where you'll store it and how much you want to spend. As for fuel, gas is quicker to heat up, more convenient and more controllable, while charcoal has the virtue of authenticity and can be more fun.

## Useful features

Grills may be cast iron or wire. Cast iron is more robust, but can be heavy to remove for cleaning. A raised lip makes it easier to turn food over.

Cooking hoods enable you to roast or smoke food using indirect heat. Hinges and side handles make them easier to use. A temperature indicator is a useful check for when the hood is closed.

Griddles and hotplates can be used to cook delicate food that would otherwise fall through a grill. However, fat can accumulate on them which could cause a flare-up.

Warming racks keep cooked food warm, away from the main grill, but you may need long tongs to reach over the grill safely.

Side-burners feature on some gas barbecues to whip up a sauce or stir fry, but you need to take care that pans are not knocked.

Shelves are generally useful but shelves in the base can make

it harder to move the barbecue.

Radiants and flavourisers improve the evenness of heating. Some gas barbecues have lava rock or ceramic briquette radiants above the burners, which absorb the heat from the gas and radiate it back to the food. Charcoal vaporises fat as it drips off the food. Some barbecues include metal bars between the grill and the gas called flavourisers which vaporise the fat. Radiants do this to a lesser extent.

## Barbecue safety

Always make sure the barbecue is on a firm, level, heatproof surface away from buildings, trees, fences and anything else combustible.

- ❖ Never leave the barbecue unattended.
- ❖ Keep young children and pets away from the barbecue area.
- ❖ Use long-handled tongs and oven gloves to avoid burning yourself.
- ❖ Only use proper barbecue lighters. Never use paraffin, petrol, white spirit or lighter fuel to ignite a barbecue.
- ❖ With gas barbecues, turn off the gas at the bottle when not in use.

## Top cooking tips

Prepare as much as you can before you start cooking - good organisation makes for a relaxed barbecue.

- ❖ Keep prepared food covered,

preferably indoors.

- ❖ Lightly brush the cooking rack with oil to stop food sticking. Soak wooden skewers in water for half an hour before use to stop them catching fire.
- ❖ Light charcoal barbecues 45 minutes before you want to start cooking. Wait until the flames die down and a layer of ash forms so you don't burn the food.
- ❖ Use marinades to add flavour - baste the meat or veg during cooking too.
- ❖ Foil wrapping helps keep delicate food like fish and vegetables from disintegrating, and prevents charring of food.
- ❖ Throw a handful of herbs on the coals or grill for a delicious Provençal aroma.
- ❖ Beef, lamb and venison cuts may be eaten rare (still pink), but never eat poultry, burgers, sausages, kebabs or offal unless completely cooked.

## Choosing a patio heater

Patio heaters allow you to extend your evenings outdoors, not just in summer but in spring and autumn too. Although they have only been around for a few years there is a wealth of models available. This factsheet covers free-standing and table-top gas heaters but there are also solid-fuel-burning chimineas and braziers, and even electric heaters. They all work by producing radiant energy, and so

only heat the objects directly in their path. You will need to be within a couple of metres of even the most powerful heaters to feel any real benefit.

Gas heaters are rated by their kW output (which ranges from around 7kW to 15kW for free-standing heaters). However, the amount of heat they actually produce is also governed by the design of the emitter that surrounds the burners, and the size and position of the reflector at the top. Most are adjustable. Table-top heaters are less powerful, at around 3kW to 6kW and, being on a table, tend to only warm to your head and shoulders so can leave your legs

and feet feeling chilly.

Table-top versions are light and easy to carry; free-standing ones sometimes come with wheels, making it possible to move them with the gas bottle in place. Without the gas bottle most are light enough to carry fairly easily.

#### **Patio heater safety**

- ❖ Only buy models with anti-tilt shut-off devices, so that the flow of gas is cut off immediately if the heater gets knocked over.
- ❖ Check the heater has a solid base, is stable, and the wheels don't move when standing.
- ❖ Look for heaters where the parts that get really hot (the emitter and reflector) are higher than 2m from the ground, or are

protected with a wire guard.

- ❖ With table-top heaters, a hose that fits through the central hole of the table with a quick-release connector is less likely to cause accidents than one which drapes over the edge.
- ❖ Position the heater away from any combustible material, including plants.
- ❖ Never use patio heaters indoors. They can be used in a large marquees, but make sure there is plenty of ventilation.
- ❖ Patio heaters can blow over in strong winds. Store undercover or in a sheltered spot when not in use.

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