

THE GUIDE TO WINTERTAINING

Even as daylight dwindles and temperatures tumble, there are still ways to have a stylish and fun outdoor party.

During the warm-weather months of this past year, outdoor gatherings with guest lists carefully compiled to observe COVID-related restrictions helped open up our social lives. But the advent of winter doesn't mean we have to close them again. Calgary winters are harsh, no doubt, and outdoor "wintertaining" can be a challenge, but Calgarians are a tough bunch and more than up to the challenge. So we spoke to local events experts for tips on how to throw a great outdoor winter shindig. Remember, an outdoor gathering is only *lower* risk than gathering indoors so be vigilant when it comes to safety.

First, figure out your budget and decide whether you're a dabbler or in it for the long haul. "Doing an event outdoors in the best of winter weather is expensive," says Kara Chomistek, president of PARK, a local events production company. If you're not ready to invest in things like patio heaters and shelters, party rental companies such as Modern Rentals, Party Rental Depot and Radar's Rentals will have the gear you need.

If it's -40°C on party day, you probably need to reschedule. Otherwise proper attire is the key to success. "There is no such thing as bad weather," says Victor Jutras, director of resort activities at Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, "just people not wearing appropriate gear." The day of the party, send the forecast to your guests along with clothing suggestions. Have spare scarves, mitts, toques, personal hand warmers and blankets to loan or give out.

Heat, light and shelter are three key elements for successful wintertaining. For heat, go with tiki torches, heat lamps, firepits and fire tables, or, if you want to make things more official, install patio-heating fixtures like those offered by Calcana Industries. Heat and light often go hand-in-hand, so

if you've got flames you don't have to work too hard on lighting — string lights will do. For something more permanent, The Outdoor Lighting Company has great options.

Shelters trap heat and block out wind and snow, making them a wintertaining must-have. The top-of-the-line option is a permanent structure such as a gazebo or luxury shed, but even a pop-up canopy makes a difference. Naomi Langer-McIntosh, creative director of Banff-based Mountain Event Rentals, recommends tents with radiant heaters and free-standing propane heaters. But, she cautions, be aware of the wind. "Wind blows away heat, no matter how many

heaters you have, and can be hazardous with wood-burning fire pits."

For activities, backyard games like ring toss and cornhole still work in the winter. Or host a dance party — just make sure you have a weatherproof sound system. A backyard rink for skating, hockey and curling is more ambitious. Canadian company Pro Hockey Life carries Hockeyshot Revolution Skate-Able Synthetic Ice Tiles in packs of 10, so your "ice" won't melt if a Chinook blows in on the day of your party.

Hot drinks are essential, so set up a self-serve coffee and hot chocolate bar (complete with sanitizer). Prepare a batch of spiked apple cider, hot toddies or mulled wine for guests who imbibe. Hot dogs or s'mores cooked over the fire are classics for a reason and adding a grate over the firepit allows for more campfire cooking options. If you want something fancier or less hands-on, consider hiring a caterer or food truck. If you plan to keep guests out of your home when nature calls, rent a restroom trailer from Radar's Rentals.

Ultimately, remember that wintertaining — just like any entertaining — is supposed to be fun. Enjoy yourself and your guests will, too.

"THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS BAD WEATHER."
VICTOR JUTRAS



ANATOMY OF AN OUTDOOR WINTER PARTY

Set up Backyard Games

Ring toss, cornhole and other backyard game are still fun in the snow for adults and kids. A little activity will increase heart rates and get your guests' minds off the cold.

Dress for the Weather

Inform your guests of the forecast on the day of your event and make suggestions on appropriate clothing choices. Have spare scarves, mitts, toques, etc. to loan out or give away as party favours.

Let the Music Play

Weatherproof sound systems are available at retailers like K&W Audio. Music sets the mood and dancing will increase body temperatures. Clear away snow and ice from the dance area.

Install a Skating Rink

You *could* flood the backyard, but synthetic ice is easier, plus, it doesn't melt in the event of a temperature spike. Check out Hockeyshot Revolution Skate-Able Synthetic Ice Tiles by Pro Hockey Life.



Light it Up

Daylight is in limited supply in the winter so lighting is essential. Keep things simple with outdoor Christmas lights or fairy lights, or go all out with curtain lights, outdoor lamps, hanging lanterns or permanent light fixtures and sconces.



Make it Hot

Heat is essential for wintertaining. Options run from cheap (tiki torches and DIY firepits) to luxury (patio heaters and fire tables with wind guards). Give out individual hand warmers and keep an eye on the wind around open flames.



Take Shelter

Anything from tents to luxury shed structures will help block out wind and precipitation while containing heat. Go with something semi-enclosed to ensure proper ventilation.



Rent a Conversation Starter

Make your winter gathering stand out with a stunt rental. Two options are the inflatable, imitation snow structure from Party Rental Depot and The Fender Blender pedal-powered generator from Open Streets Events.



Serve Hot Drinks

A DIY hot chocolate bar provides both refreshment and something fun to do. As for the harder stuff, a bulk batch of spiked apple cider, hot toddies or mulled wine is always a crowd-pleaser.



Cook Over the Fire

Hot dogs and s'mores are all-time classics. A grate over the firepit allows for a wider range of options such as roasting chestnuts. Keep sanitizer nearby any food or beverage stations.

7 WINTERTAINING WINNERS

MUST-HAVE PRODUCTS FOR AN OUTDOOR WINTER PARTY THAT CAN BE PURCHASED LOCALLY.



Heartprint Threads Acumen Throw Blanket

This Calgary-based company makes its blankets in Ecuador in collaboration with local artists. For every blanket sold, the company donates another to a Calgary charity. The Acumen comes in four colours.

From \$108, at Ninth and Brick, 1312B 9 Ave. S.E., ninthandbrick.com; DYP Refillery, 2036 34 Ave. S.W., 403-200-7443, dyprefillery.com; and Stealing Home, 1010 17 Ave. S.W., 403-245-0777, stealinghome.ca



Spirit Hills Bonfire Mulled Wine

This mulled "wine" from a flower winery in Millarville is made of flower nectar, berries and spices. Its flavour is reminiscent of warm berry pie with booze.

\$24 to \$28, at Calgary Co-Op Liquor Stores and many other retailers, spirithillswinery.com



Sonos Move

This weatherproof speaker connects using either Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. The sound is full and loud enough for socially distanced ears.

\$499, at Visions Electronics, four Calgary locations, visions.ca; and K&W Audio, 1424 4 St. S.W., 403-244-8111, kandwaudio.com



Galanter & Jones Apollo Conversation Set

This entry-level outdoor furniture set by Galanter & Jones comes with two heated chairs and an unheated table, available in two sizes.

Heated set starts at \$2,835, individual pieces and customizations offered, available online through Calgary-based Pash Collective, pashcollective.com



Brunswick Parsons Teak Tournament Table Tennis

This gorgeous teak table-tennis game is high quality and weatherproofed for the great outdoors. Wipe down paddles and ball between games for guests' safety. \$9,221 with RH membership (\$100 a year) or \$12,995 without, available at Restoration Hardware, Southcentre, 403-271-2122, rh.com

Toasterz Reusable Heat Pack

Reusable and non-toxic, these heat packs can get as hot as 54°C for as long as two hours. Boil in water for five minutes to reactivate after first use.

\$7, at MEC, 830 10 Ave. S.W., 403-269-2420; mec.ca



Swissmar Mont Brule Electric Fondue Set

This dishwasher-safe, flame-free fondue set can hold up to a litre of cheese or chocolate. It has a 1,000-watt heating element with adjustable temperature controls.

\$120, at Britannia Kitchen & Home, 816 49 Ave. S.W., 403-243-4444, britanniahome.com