

Sunrooms, gazebos and other ways to make the most of the outdoors



WHILE IT WON'T PROTECT AGAINST THE BUGS, AN INTERIOR COURTYARD CAN CREATE A COSY MICROCLIMATE.

PETER FRITZ/CHRISTOPHER SIMMONDS ARCHITECT / OTTAWA CITIZEN

Photos: Sunrooms, gazebos and more

Make the most of outdoor living without the bugs and nasty weather with enclosed spaces such as sunrooms, gazebos and more.



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Backyard, summer time, family life: an unbeatable combination, thought Carp residents Lee and Sue Sumner. Then again, this is Ottawa – mosquito central and ground zero for fickle weather.



ADJUST

So the couple went in search of a solution. After shopping around, they wound up with a laid-back, three-season room added to the rear of their home, one of several options available to homeowners wanting to maximize outdoor living while minimizing the bugs and vagaries of weather. The Sumners' room is a rich blend of natural daylight and rustic pine with exposed roof trusses, a wood-burning fireplace and direct access from the house via the kitchen patio doors. When the cold weather arrives, it can be simply closed off.



COMMENT



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WeatherWall Enclosures (Ottawa) supplied the Eze-Breeze window panels — each window consists of a screen and four movable sections for multiple ventilation options — and contracted out the construction of the 300-square-foot room.

“In the summer that’s where we eat most of our meals, and after the girls are in bed we sit out there,” says Sue.

“It’s way beyond our highest expectation,” says her husband. “It’s halfway between being in the house and the garden. When we get the fireplace cranked up, we can even use it a bit on a winter day.”

The hexagonal room cost roughly \$40,000 including windows (they are made of shatterproof vinyl rather than glass). The fireplace and some other extras added \$10,000 to the price.

Custom-made Eze-Breeze windows don't conduct heat and are therefore a cooler option than glass, according to [WeatherWall \(Ottawa\)](#) owner John Caldwell. They're available in clear or UV ray-blocking styles as well as floor-to-ceiling configurations. Along with matching doors, they can be added to an existing structure such as a porch or gazebo or included in an addition like the Summers'.

When added to an existing porch or other structure, windows are \$400 to \$500 per panel plus installation, says Caldwell.

"We've installed them everywhere from townhouse condos to mansions. It's a cottage in your own backyard."

Glass walls and courtyards

Ottawa architect Christopher Simmonds suggests installing an expanse of screened sliding doors at the rear of your home to connect with the outside world without going to the expense of adding an entire structure.

"You can get 16-foot sliding doors in four panels, so you have an eight-foot-wide opening. Then you can add operable windows at either end of the room for more light and ventilation."

Adding an exterior structure can work if it's done strategically, he says, but not much is gained if its roof blocks daylight from entering the house.

He's also designed residential courtyards. They're not bug-proof, but they can create alluring microclimates, according to Simmonds. "They block the wind and trap the heat and sun so you can be comfortable sitting outside on a sunny day in April."

Sunrooms

[Betterliving Patio and Sunrooms of Ottawa](#) sells sunrooms (aka solariums or Florida rooms). Available in both three and four-season models, the tempered-glass structures run \$150 to \$200 per square foot, are attached to the house and mounted on concrete pylons or steel posts that sit below the frost line, and have an aluminum roof.

Simmonds worries that glass-intensive structures can create heat buildup, but Betterliving's Mike Pisapio says that exterior solar shades allow visibility to the outside while blocking the sun's heat.

The company's four-season models have double-paned Energy Star windows and insulated floors. Heating and air conditioning vents can be connected to the house's HVAC system.

Sunrooms provide flexible living space, says Pisapio. "People have their coffee and read the paper in the morning or they use them for family rooms with pool tables and flat-screen TVs. It's just like any other extension on a house."

The company also sells screen rooms. Costing around \$100 per square foot, they combat bugs and the rain, but not chilly weather.

Gazebos

Gazebos — available in a rainbow of styles and sizes, including custom-built models, prefabs and DIY kits — are a free-standing option for outdoor living. Some are open-sided, others entirely closed.

They can be mounted on or adjacent to a deck or placed at a distance from the house surrounded by vegetation with a pathway leading to them, says Dan Kelly of Ottawa's [Hickory Dickory Decks](#).

He sells cedar and low-maintenance, PVC-clad gazebos, including custom designs ranging from \$12,000 to \$30,000. Kelly suggests mounting gazebos on concrete posts or a poured concrete pad to protect against frost heave.

“Before you pick one, plan what you want to do,” he says. “Do you want a table and chairs? Outdoor couches? A firepit with chairs around it?”

Prefabricated gazebos in cedar, pressure-treated pine, low-maintenance PVC and other materials are available from big box stores as well as companies such as G.B. Pre-Fab in Ottawa’s west end and Orléans Prestige Garden Sheds. The latter’s product line includes handsome structures from Gazebec starting at \$3,625 plus installation.

Like open-sided gazebos, pergolas won’t protect you against bugs or bad weather, but their slatted roofs can provide shade for outdoor sitting, especially if covered with sheathing, fabric or woody vines. You can also add privacy screening on the sides, says Sandy Grella of Lanark Cedar, which sells pergolas made of durable eastern white cedar.

Private patios and more

Our quest for the outdoor life continues to generate creative solutions. Private patios off ground-floor master bedrooms are a niche option generally restricted to the custom-home market. Those with more modest budgets could, instead, consider hanging an outdoorsy hammock inside a screened-in porch for the best of both summer worlds.

Another option for maximizing outdoor living: automated retractable awnings to keep the sun and rain at bay. A 12- by eight-foot awning with motor and remote control runs \$4,500 to \$5,000 from companies such as Ottawa Awning & Canvas or Betterliving Patio and Sunrooms of Ottawa.