

Outdoor Furniture Department

Invest in Quality

The old adage “you get what you pay for” is true for patio furniture. Plastic resin chairs or side tables look great on the shelf and will keep their good looks for a year or two out in the sun, but in time they will become brittle and lose their vibrant coloring. The same is true for some wood products and true wicker pieces. Shop with care, checking consumer reports and reviews, before making a big purchase.

From sloppy welds to cracked casters to amateurish paint finishes, a close inspection will expose that great outdoor furniture bargain for what it really is – a bad buy that probably won’t last until next season. There are a couple of important lessons here. It’s easy to think of outdoor furnishings as somewhat less important than the stuff you buy for indoor use. In fact, the reverse is often true. Bucks County’s outdoor furniture expert and designer Beverly Clemenson states, “What you buy to use outside has to stand up to sun exposure, wind, rain and probably some roughhousing, too. Inspect every piece you’re considering for flaws, especially if the deal sounds too good to be true. This is one area where a higher price is often a good indicator of better quality.”



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TYPES OF CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

- Extruded and Cast Aluminum, plastic and PVC -- These construction materials are rust-proof, lightweight, relatively inexpensive and require very little weather treating. You can also wash them easily with a little soap and water.
- Steel and wrought iron -- Both are heavy duty and sturdy but will rust if not weather-proofed or painted periodically.
- Rattan, wicker and natural grasses -- It's pretty amazing how well natural materials like wicker look and last outdoors, especially when they are treated with a resin finish. They may require additional weatherproofing every couple of years, though.
- Wood -- Natural wood looks very attractive in outdoor furnishings. It makes sturdy furniture that can be as comfortable as anything you use indoors. It does require regular treatment with a preservative and may also require UV protection. Choose weather-resistant woods like teak, redwood, cypress and cedar.

SIZING IT UP:

Some patio chairs are just too narrow and skimpy. Others are built so low to the ground that getting out of them can be downright embarrassing -- especially for older folks. Sizing for love seats and couches can be tricky, too. Some are pretty deep from front to back, which can make them uncomfortable to sit in for any length of time. When shopping for outdoor furniture, sit down and relax -- literally. Test the pieces you have in mind. Think comfort and buy accordingly.

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SHADE:

During the hottest part of the day, sitting outside can get pretty unpleasant if your furniture isn't situated in the shade. What's the next best thing to a big old shade tree? Some sort of shade cover. Whether you're using a crank operated market umbrella or cantilever umbrella, a motorized awning or are blessed with a permanent wood or fiberglass roof over your patio or deck, make arrangements for some naturally refreshing and sheltering shade.

BE REALISTIC:

It's nice to think of your outdoor room as an oasis of calm in a hectic world, but it isn't on a desert island somewhere, it's situated on your property -- and sometimes in plain view of the neighbors and people driving or walking by. You may think that bright orange lounge with the yellow smiley faces looks adorable, just make sure it doesn't clash with the rest of your home's exterior. Sure, outdoor furnishings should be fun and carefree, but if you just spent a fortune trying to improve your home's curb appeal, don't spoil the effect with a silly, seasonal accent piece.