

Selecting quality outdoor furnishings is an important decision for many people who enjoy spending time outdoors at home with friends and family. The variety of fine outdoor furnishings is without bounds; the huge selection of different materials, styles, finishes, and fabrics among brand names and promotional lines can make selecting outdoor furnishings a challenge. Here are some guidelines to help you in making your purchase to be sure you select fine casual furnishings you will be able to enjoy for many years.

1. Spend some time planning.
 - Take the indoors outside. Consider the style of your home, and shop for furnishings and accessories to complement your architecture, your colors, and your décor. Outdoor furniture styles range from classic to highly contemporary – there is something to suit every home.
 - Think about how you intend to use your outdoor spaces. Some areas, such as a screened porch or sunroom, call for comfortable seating groups. Other areas, such as a back patio where you will be grilling and entertaining, call for dining groups and accessories such as teacarts and baker's racks.
 - Measure the spaces you want to furnish, and consider how many people you want to fit comfortably in a space at a given time. Do you have a large family you would like to seat at one dining table, or would you prefer a small bistro set where the two of you can sit and sip coffee?
2. Think about the material and construction of the furniture you would like. There are many factors to consider when making a decision.
 - Be realistic about how much time you want to invest in maintenance. Different materials require different levels of maintenance in terms of cleaning, paint touch-up, replacement of fabrics and cushions, etc. When shopping, ask questions about the specifics of how to care for the furniture you select.
 - The weight of the material can be a factor. If you like to move your furniture frequently – pulling up extra chairs around a dining table, or moving chaise lounges around a pool deck, you'll want your furniture to be a manageable weight or have wheels attached. If your lakeside dock is on a windy point, your furniture will need to be heavy enough that it won't blow away.
 - Consider the level of exposure to the elements. A covered or screened porch offers a greater flexibility for different materials. Natural wicker will last many more years in a protected area than fully exposed on an open patio. If you are furnishing a pool deck, you'll want to consider furniture that will dry quickly, won't hold too much heat in the sun, and that will not be affected by pool chemicals and suntan oils.

- The current move towards salt-water pools over traditional chlorine pools should also be considered when making your selection. Wrought iron furniture cannot tolerate the exposure to salt water. Frames must be aluminum, with high-quality acrylic fabrics for cushions or slings.
3. Consider the return on your investment. Quality outdoor furnishings can seem like an expensive initial investment. Shop for well-made, durable pieces with a warranty. While there are many promotional items on the market, you may not be able to get replacement parts or make warranty claims. Don't sacrifice quality for what seems like a good deal.

An Overview of Outdoor Furniture Materials.

Natural wicker – woven from natural fibers over a rattan frame. Should be used in a protected area. When left outdoors, will require annual cleaning and possibly paint touch-up. Select cushions made from all-weather fabrics to resist fading and mildew.

All-weather wicker can take more exposure than natural wicker. One popular version is a PVC product woven over aluminum frame. Some promotional versions are made with a rattan frame which will rot, or a steel frame which will rust.

Wrought iron is extremely durable. Will require occasional paint touch-up for rust and can be repainted as needed. Frames can be treated with a light coating of auto wax in the joints to help protect against rust.

Cast and wrought aluminum are resistant to rust.

Teak wood furniture can be oiled to prevent weathering and maintain golden brown color, or can be left to weather to a silvery-gray.

Eucalyptus is a new alternative to teak. Can be oiled or allowed to weather. Has a look similar to teak, is more readily available and sustainably harvested at a fraction of the price of teak.