



Perfect Pergolas

By Lisa Bendall | Photography courtesy of Martin Stockley of Terracraft Landscape Ltd

Our guide to selecting the right outdoor structure for your yard

Wondering whether an outdoor structure like a gazebo, pergola or arbour would suit your yard? Many homeowners like the idea of creating an attractive outdoor sitting area that is at least partly sheltered from the sun.

A gazebo is fully covered, while the roof of a pergola or arbour is made of lattice or open slats so that dappled light and rain filter through. Either way, if you enjoy relaxing or entertaining outside, a gazebo or pergola provides a comfortable place to do it.

"The key thing a pergola can do is extend seasons," says Martin Stockley, an experienced landscaper, who owns Terracraft Landscape Ltd. in Whistler, B.C. On a brutally hot day, you'll have



instant shade. If there's a light rain, a covering will protect you. Either way, you're not running for the shelter of the house. "There are no windows – you're outside with the garden and nature."

And that's just what we seem to want these days. "More and more people are investing in their back yards," says Maxime Harvey, merchandising director of forest products for RONA. He says with the increased popularity of staycations, people are making their outdoor spaces comfortable and cozy in the same way they might repaint or install new flooring inside the house. "People are taking that outside, to have a fresh back yard that looks a little different from their neighbours." A beautiful, functional outdoor structure can even enhance the value of a home.

There are many options for a gazebo or pergola, and that's probably why they work for so many people. "Anything can be done," says Harvey. "The limit is your imagination, basically."

At the inexpensive end, you can buy prefabricated steel-frame gazebos or vinyl arbours from home improvement stores for a few hundred dollars. The materials are generally weatherproof and maintenance-free, although a low-end model may not withstand a severe storm. At the high end, Terracraft has been working on a post-and-beam structure of kiln-dried fir, complete with built-in hot tub, dining area and waterfall. Final bill? Over \$100,000.

ABOVE LEFT: This dramatic high-end custom gazebo project, completed by Terracraft, incorporates a waterfall.

ABOVE: This pergola is used to shelter a hot tub, while still offering all the benefits of being outside.



In the middle range, a custom carpentry job may cost a few thousand dollars. One benefit over prefab products, of course, is that your choices won't be as narrow. But it's important at the outset to communicate clearly with the designer about your needs and wishes, so you aren't unpleasantly surprised by the final result.

Think long-term when you're planning your project. Even if you have the skills to build it yourself, it might be a good investment to involve a designer at least at the start. You'll be using your outdoor space for years, so you want to make sure you're happy with it. Don't build a new pergola on top of an old deck. Instead, make fresh new decking part of the overall project.

And when you choose your materials, consider how much maintenance will be needed over time. "Keep it easy," says Harvey. "People want to enjoy summer, they don't want to work

outside. They work enough in the week." If you're using wood, for example, and decide to stain it, be aware that you'll need to refinish it every few years.

If you're building the structure yourself, make sure you've got all the right tools and materials you need. "Missing a piece of lumber in the middle of your project is not the nicest surprise you can have," says Harvey.

What can go under the finished shelter? You could opt for a simple bench or chair or, if there's space enough, a full set of comfy patio furniture. "You can make a whole outdoor kitchen," Stockley points out. And if you install a heater, as he's known some B.C. homeowners to do, your outdoor space can be enjoyed even on a mild winter's day.

Depending how your structure is built, you can add a natural look with vines and other climbing plants. But be selective. Don't choose varieties that will quickly grow out

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of control, or won't have the right sun conditions to stay healthy. Adds Stockley: "You don't want to plant stuff that attract bees – I've been there!"

Many homeowners opt to place the structure close to the house. That way, you can enjoy benefits even when you're not outside. If you plan the dimensions and the angle of the ceiling joists properly, it can shade the house in the summer. And then in winter, when the angle of the sun changes, sunshine will stream through your windows.

Building beside your house isn't the only choice, of course. If the yard size allows for it, Stockley likes a gazebo that's a distance away from the house. "It becomes more interesting," he says. "If it's off in the corner of the property with a winding path, it draws you. It's a destination."

And once you arrive, you're surrounded by peace and fresh air. Bliss. **HC**



TOP: This post and beam gazebo was made with kiln-dried fir.
ABOVE: Pergolas allow dappled light to filter through, and offer protection from light rain.