

Host a Canada Day Celebration

While festivals, parades, concerts, and fireworks displays are all amazing choices to celebrate Canada Day, nothing matches the way you can relax and enjoy the company at a gathering of friends and family. Even if it's last minute, here are some easy tips to put together the perfect backyard Canada Day Celebration at your own home.

Decorate

Decorations set a festive atmosphere before anything else, don't skip them! Anything and everything red and white will do. Hang banners, flags, or garlands around your backyard and any place guests will be gathering - and don't forget the front porch, especially if you're located along the parade route! Use red and white tablecloths, napkins, balloons, chair cushions, cups, and serving dishes – anything and everything you can find in your house that reminds you of the Canadian spirit.

If you're crafty, you can even make your own Canada Day banners and decorations from paper, fabric, ribbon, wood, or metal. Sky's the limit and the more creative you are the more memorable your decorations will be.

Menu

Food has a distinct way of connecting us and our traditions. By the time Canada Day rolls around, you're probably itching to get outside in the nice weather, a backyard cookout tops the list of traditional fare for our nation's birthday. Put together a traditional or unique menu featuring a special red and white dessert, refreshing seasonal fruits, and anything with maple syrup. Or, let everyone show off their best and share the work with a potluck.

Don't forget to make a snazzy red drink!

Activities

Games and sports are natural friend-makers. Having activities available for kids and grownups alike will ensure your crew is bonding and making memories.

- Set up a net for volleyball or badminton, set up a croquet court or lawn darts, a jump rope contest, a run-through sprinkler for the kids, or sidewalk chalk for driveway art.
- Play a game of backyard checkers, or yard dice.
- A scavenger hunt will get everyone involved and practicing their puzzle-solving skills.
- Kick-off Canada History Week with a game of trivia or share the history of your area.
- Party poppers and sparklers are a special delight for kids.

Get Dressed Up

Encourage all your guests to dress up in red and white clothes and maple leaves! Wear silly hats, stripes, and flags, and paint your face. Find something sparkly and fun.

Music

What's a party without music? You can play any music you like that suits your crowd – but how about putting together a playlist of all your favourite Canadian artists? What a great backdrop for your

celebration! You don't even have to do it yourself, there are plenty of premade playlists online featuring Canadian artists.

Get Out There

You don't have to choose between a backyard cookout and all the neat public celebrations, plan an outing for your group to watch the parade or fireworks display. This can be especially fun for children or if older kids are in the marching band.

How will you celebrate the spirit of Canada this year? Amid the festivals, concerts, cookouts, parades, and fireworks displays this Canada Day, take a moment to reflect on unity and our multicultural history here in Canada, and remember we're stronger together.

Host an Independence Day Celebration

While festivals, parades, concerts, and fireworks displays are all amazing choices to celebrate Independence Day, nothing matches the way you can relax and enjoy the company at a gathering of friends and family. Even if it's last minute, here are some easy tips to put together the perfect backyard Fourth of July Celebration at your own home.

Decorate

Decorations set a festive atmosphere before anything else, don't skip them! Anything and everything red, white, and blue will do. Hang banners, flags, or garlands around your backyard and any place guests will be gathering - and don't forget the front porch, especially if you're located along the parade route! Use red, white, or blue tablecloths, napkins, balloons, chair cushions, cups, and serving dishes – anything and everything you can find in your house that reminds you of the American spirit.

If you're crafty, you can even make your own Independence Day banners and decorations from paper, fabric, ribbon, wood, or metal. Sky's the limit and the more creative you are the more memorable your decorations will be.

Menu

Food has a distinct way of connecting us and our traditions. By the time the Fourth of July rolls around, you're probably itching to get outside in the nice weather, a backyard cookout tops the list of traditional fare for any summertime gathering. Put together a traditional or unique menu featuring a special red, white, and blue dessert, refreshing seasonal fruits, and anything fun. Or, let everyone show off their best and share the work with a potluck.

Don't forget to make a snazzy red or blue drink!

Activities

Games and sports are natural friend-makers. Having activities available for kids and grownups alike will ensure your crew is bonding and making memories.

- Set up a net for volleyball or badminton, set up a croquet court or lawn darts, cornhole, a jump rope contest, a run-through sprinkler for the kids, or sidewalk chalk for driveway art.
- Play a game of backyard checkers, or yard dice.
- A scavenger hunt will get everyone involved and practicing their puzzle-solving skills.
- Party poppers and sparklers are a special delight for kids.

Get Dressed Up

Encourage all your guests to dress up in red, white, and blue clothes! Wear silly hats, stripes, stars, and flags, and paint your face. Find something sparkly and fun.

Music

What's a party without music? You can play any music you like that suits your crowd – but how about putting together a playlist of all your favorite patriotic songs? What a great backdrop for your celebration! You don't even have to do it yourself, there are plenty of premade playlists online featuring patriotic songs.

Get Out There

You don't have to choose between a backyard cookout and all the neat public celebrations, plan an outing for your group to watch the parade or fireworks display. This can be especially fun for children or if older kids are in the marching band.

How will you celebrate the spirit of America this year? Amid the festivals, concerts, cookouts, parades, and fireworks displays this Independence Day, take a moment to reflect on freedom and our multicultural history here in the United States, and remember we're stronger together.

Basic Outdoor Maintenance to Maximize Your Home's Curb Appeal

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.

The curb appeal of your home sets the tone and defines its place amongst neighboring homes. This first impression can draw potential buyers in or turn them away. A well-maintained lawn, landscape, and home exterior reflect to a buyer the maintenance and care of the rest of the house and can increase the appeal and perceived value of your home. Good curb appeal will show off your home in listing photographs, which will increase interest, drive-bys, and viewings and make your home more memorable.

There's no question that an outdoor kitchen, in-ground pool, or a new patio will turn heads, and these projects can increase your day-to-day enjoyment as well as increase the value of your home, but surprisingly, your greatest returns will come from more mundane improvements. Here are some regular maintenance jobs you can do to increase the curb appeal of your home and put your best foot forward when it's time to list your home for sale.

Clean the House

Consider whether the roof, gutters, siding, windows, driveway, or fences need to be washed. You can wash it yourself in an afternoon using a power washer or hire a professional to make your house shine. The difference between a bright clean house and a dingy, dirty house is stark, and so is the impression on potential buyers.

Basic Lawn Care

The 2023 Remodeling Impact Report by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Landscape Professionals notes that standard lawn care service has the highest return on investment of any outdoor project at 217%, recommending six seasonal applications of fertilizer and/or weed control. Fill any holes and seed bare spots.

Landscape Maintenance

Landscape Maintenance holds second place for the next highest rate of return for outdoor projects. Keep the lawn mowed and trimmed nicely. Clean up the edges along sidewalks, driveways, and garden beds. Mulch garden beds, trim hedges, and clear any debris.

The Details

Clean your outdoor light fixtures and make sure they're all working. Check your house numbers and mailbox to make sure they're in good condition. Consider a fresh coat of paint on your front door.

Tidy Up

Clutter collects just as well outdoors as indoors. Put all tools and equipment away neatly; keep outside toys organized and pet supplies clean. Outdoor spaces should be staged for viewing just as nicely as indoor spaces.

Spruce it up

Set the tone for your whole home by making the front as inviting as possible. Consider adding flowers, ferns, or other decorative plants either in containers to your front porch or stoop or in garden beds. Create a small seating area. Place a seasonal wreath on the front door.

End of Summer Home Maintenance Checklist

Ahhh summertime. Cookouts, nature hikes, pool games, outdoor markets, parades, concerts... and home maintenance. If you've been filling up your schedule with summertime fun, don't sweat, there's still time to make sure your house stays in tip-top shape.

Use this simple checklist to round out your summer to-do list and ensure your home is running smoothly year-round.

Outside:

- Look for cracks and openings around the house, foundation, windows, and doors. Seal up any openings with outdoor caulk.
- Check that gutters are in good repair and clean out if necessary.
- Clean outdoor lights and replace any burned-out bulbs.
- Check the garage-door, chain, opener, and hinges. Make sure they're oiled and working properly. Check the batteries in the keypad and remote openers.
- Scrub decks or patios, repair and reseal if needed.
- Inspect fences and gates, make any necessary repairs. Paint or seal if necessary.

Inside:

- Inspect all doors, locks, and hinges. Oil hinges, service locks, check weather stripping and threshold plates. Clean doors and windows if needed.
- Inspect windows and screens. Make sure everything is working properly, mend holes in screens, and wash the windows inside and out.
- Check the plumbing. Look around sinks, dishwasher, washing machine, shower, and toilets for signs of water leaks. Look in and around cabinets too. Replace washers in faucets and showerheads if they drip or leak.
- Clean and seal tile grout if needed.

Appliances:

- Service the washer and dryer. Check supply hoses, clean the appliances, remove lint from the dryer and the dryer vents.
- Check water softener. Refill salt if necessary and check for leaks.
- Flush the water heater and ensure it's in good condition.
- Schedule your furnace tune-up and inspection, and change HVAC air filters.
- Clean the kitchen exhaust fan and filter.
- Clean refrigerator and freezer coils, empty and clean drip trays, and ensure they are in good working order.
- Clean the oven and any other appliances.

5 Tips to Master Back-to-School

Just as the last day of school marked the beginning of summer, the first day of school marks the close. Whether you're excited to start the next school year or sad to say goodbye to the carefree days of summer, here are five tips to master back-to-school.

End of summer celebration – Take time to notice the good stuff in life. It can be anything that feels like a celebration to you - one last trip to your favorite beach or hiking trail, a pool party, an afternoon ice cream cone at the local shop, a road trip, or stargazing on a balmy night. Make time for everyone to share their favorite memories from summer.

Kick-off meeting –Get the whole family involved with a kickoff meeting. It will give you and your kids a chance to set expectations, define responsibilities, address worries and challenges, go over what to expect, and work out a schedule and a system. Give your kids a chance to shine too, get their ideas for chores, lunches, and routines, this could be the best school year yet!

Back to bedtimes – Two weeks before school starts, start getting back to bedtime. It's much easier to get to sleep a little earlier each night, easing back into the normal routine, than to try to change it overnight. And this isn't just for the little ones - teenagers and grown-ups need sleep too.

Set up study areas – It could be a desk, a nook, a quiet chair, or the kitchen table. Make a dedicated spot with easy access to supplies, limited distractions, and always ready to sit down and study. Having this space defined helps kids establish the routine, "when I sit here, I study," which helps them focus, and helps you keep everyone on track.

School administrative setup –Save yourself a ton of stress by taking an hour or so to collect all the information you have for the upcoming year. Print a copy of their schedule, add their teachers' email addresses and phone numbers to your address book, add the school calendar to your calendar, and gather information about sports, clubs, or organizations you or your child might be interested in. A little time up front will have you feeling on top of things all year.