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FOR YOUR OUTDOOR KITCHEN

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A HOME

as unique as you are!

WELCOMING SPRING INTO YOUR HOME: A HOW-TO GUIDE





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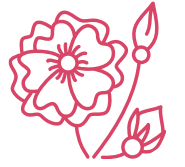
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Essentials (and luxuries) for your outdoor kitchen



As warm weather approaches, it's the perfect time to transform your backyard, patio or balcony into an inviting space for guests to enjoy delicious meals. Here are seven features you can incorporate into your outdoor kitchen to impress your friends and make the most of the summer season:

A fridge

Summer calls for cold drinks! Keep your lemonade, alcohol and meal-prep ingredients chilled with an outdoor fridge. Position it strategically so your guests have access to it, too. For a budget-friendly option, consider a patio cooler.

Comfy furniture

Create a welcoming atmosphere with high-quality, inviting outdoor furniture. Pick comfortable seating, a large sunshade or awning and a sturdy table to enhance the experience.

A smoker

Do you want to take your outdoor kitchen to the next level? Invest in a smoker for preparing meat and fish. While some smokers can be pricey, you can find models starting at only a couple hundred dollars.

A kegerator

For a professional touch, install a kegerator with beer or kombucha to bring everyone together. This unique addition is sure to add fun to your gatherings and is well worth the investment.

Visit your local retailers to create the outdoor kitchen of your dreams.

A barbecue

The ultimate symbol of summer, the barbecue is an essential part of any outdoor kitchen. Find a model that fits your space and budget—whether it's built-in, freestanding or portable. Get ready to grill mouthwatering meals!

A versatile work surface

You need space to prepare marinades and assemble plates. Invest in a weather-resistant countertop made from materials like stainless steel or granite. Hello, style and functionality! If space is tight, consider a removable sideboard.

A sink

Avoid the hassle of running in and out to rinse glasses and plates by adding a sink to your outdoor kitchen. You can choose from a variety of models, including those that connect directly to your home's plumbing or to an outdoor hose for convenience.

Is your yard lacking character? Add a low wall!

Is your front or back yard in need of a little love? Building a low wall is an excellent way to delineate your space and enhance the beauty of your landscaping.

Numerous advantages

Adding a low wall to separate different areas of your yard creates a cohesive look that brings order to uneven surfaces. This is especially beneficial on properties with steep slopes.

If the wall faces south, it can absorb the sun's heat and transfer that warmth to nearby plants, encouraging healthy growth. When properly constructed on a solid footing, a low wall is durable and adds charm to your property.

Different materials

You can build your low wall from various materials, including:

- Prefabricated concrete blocks, which provide a clean, classic appearance
- Cut stone, which provides a natural, rustic look
- Brick, which creates a refined, timeless esthetic
- Glass blocks, which provide an original, avant-garde look

Do you want to give your yard a little more structure and style? Contact a landscaping expert in your area and have a custom low wall built for you.



Summer evenings can get chilly. Consider installing a patio heater to keep you and your guests comfortable.



Paradise under a pergola!

For an outdoor space that's as functional as it is comfortable, start with a pergola. Are you thinking about buying one to enjoy the outdoors to the fullest? Here are some inspiring options.

• **Traditional.** Warm and timeless, a classic wooden pergola blends harmoniously into your decor. Made from cedar or another type of treated wood, it provides partial shade. For a lush esthetic, you can enhance your space with beautiful climbing plants.

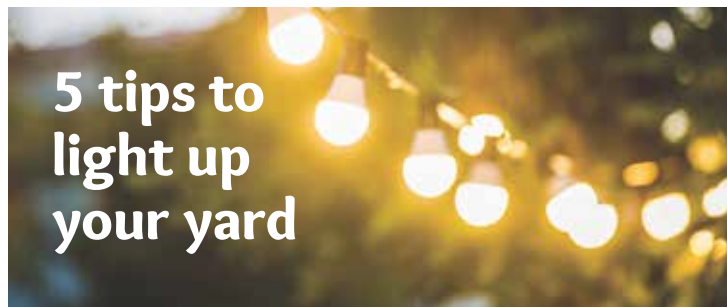


• **Modern.** Sleek and elegant, contemporary metal pergolas are often made of aluminum or steel. You can opt for simple, straight lines or upgrade to laser-cut panels or integrated lighting to elevate your outdoor space.

• **Bioclimatic.** Equipped with adjustable louvers, bioclimatic pergolas are made of maintenance-free aluminum. You can easily modulate sunlight and ventilation according to changing weather conditions.

• **Free-standing.** You don't need to attach a free-standing pergola to your house, so you can set it up wherever you want, such as by the pool, on your deck or in the middle of your garden. Available in various materials, this style is perfect for all types of landscaping.

Regardless of which option you choose, investing in a high-quality, professionally installed pergola will add undeniable charm to your property. Now, it's time to pick the one that suits your style!



5 tips to light up your yard

Want to enjoy your yard even after sunset? Follow these five expert tips to create a functional and stylishly illuminated backyard.

1. **Play with contrast.** Instead of flooding your yard with bright light, create areas of both light and shade. This will enhance the beauty of your space and add depth.
2. **Include pathway lighting.** Place small lanterns or recessed spotlights along high-traffic areas. This warm touch is far more inviting than the light from large lampposts.
3. **Spotlight your trees.** Install neutral or colored LED lights at the base of your most stunning trees, directing the light upwards. This technique will transform your garden into a magical retreat.
4. **Opt for solar-powered or battery-operated lights.** If you want to skip the hassle and expense of modifying your electrical system, explore solar-powered options or battery-operated lights that don't require an outlet.
5. **Use soft lighting on your deck.** Avoid placing blinding lights around your deck or patio to extend those summer evenings. Instead, choose hanging lights that emit soft, warm tones, and consider adding string lights for an extra festive flair.

Visit your local outdoor lighting retailers to find the perfect lamps and fixtures.



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Treat yourself to your dream yard



Privacy screens: what are your options?

Do you want to enjoy the privacy of your yard or deck this summer, away from prying eyes? Plenty of elegant and practical solutions are available to help you maintain your privacy while enhancing your outdoor space. If the thought of installing a massive, opaque fence doesn't appeal to you, why not choose a privacy screen that lets in just the right amount of light? Here are a few options to explore.

- **Fences.** Metal and wood fences are a pricier option, but they last a long time and add value to your property. For a modern look, combine materials.
- **Decorative panels.** Available in materials like wood, aluminum and polypropylene, decorative panels come in various designs, from classic slats to geometric patterns. To secure these panels, you can choose from a variety of posts and beams. Some are even specifically designed to elevate the look of your structure.
- **Faux greenery.** You can create a natural ambiance with a faux foliage privacy screen. These screens mimic plants like ferns or cedars and are made of UV-resistant materials, such as polyethylene and polyester.
- **Freestanding screen.** Sturdy and elegant, a natural wood screen will elevate the look of your yard. Keep in mind that some screens can be combined with matching planters, providing a chic and practical two-in-one solution.

You're sure to find a privacy screen that meets your taste and budget. Visit your local home renovation or hardware store to discover a multitude of stylish options.



Privacy screens are also great for camouflaging unsightly features on your property, such as garbage bins or air-conditioning units.

SPRING

Home and garden TLC time



SPRING IS HERE!

Have you prepared your home and yard to welcome it?

Are you excited about the return of warmer weather? Now's a great time to do spring-cleaning tasks around your home and yard to make the most of this season and avoid unpleasant surprises. Here's a quick checklist of things to inspect around your home.

•**Windows and screens.** Check the state of your window screens and replace them if they've been damaged over winter. This will help you better regulate the temperature and humidity in your home on hot days. You should also make sure your windows open and close properly.



•**Air-conditioner.** Test your air conditioner to ensure it's in good working order and will keep you cool when a heatwave hits. Replace or clean the filters and evaporator coils by following the manufacturer's instructions. This will help optimize the efficiency of your system.

•**Attic and ceiling.** Look for signs of water damage to your attic or ceiling, including stains, peeling paint and mould. You should also check for signs of an animal infestation, such as nests, and take the necessary measures to remove them.

•**Roof.** Examine your roof for any damage sustained over the winter, such as missing or broken shingles, pooling water and thinning or

unevenly distributed gravel. Plan the necessary repairs accordingly.

•**Gutters.** Remove debris from your gutters and ensure that water is draining away from your home's foundation. You can also take this opportunity to check for cracks or leaks in your gutters that could compromise their efficiency.

•**Foundation.** Look for cracks in your home's foundation and seal fine and hairline ones with an appropriate product. Hire an expert to evaluate cracks that are more than one centimeter wide.

•**Outdoor faucets.** Turn on your outdoor faucets to check if the cold weather damaged your pipes. You can do this by covering the spout with your thumb. If you can stop the flow, there may be a hidden leak.

•**Gardening equipment.** Sharpen the blades and check the oil levels in your lawn mower, chainsaw and hedge trimmer. Take inventory of your gardening tools and clean them as needed.

•**Vegetation.** Collect broken branches and trim greenery that's grown too close to your home. Overgrown trees and bushes can damage your siding and give pests access to your home. Additionally, trim your perennials, especially if you forgot to do so last fall.

On the count of three, roll up your sleeves or schedule an appointment with the maintenance professionals in your area to get ready to welcome spring!



A HOME as unique as you are!

In 2026, add teal green to your decor!

The color of the year, teal green, is halfway between blue and green. This modern hue blends freshness with elegance, giving your home a chic, contemporary feel while creating a calm atmosphere. Versatile and timeless, it complements every room in your home. Here's how to incorporate it into your space.

Colors

Teal green pairs wonderfully with neutral tones like white, ecru, cream and taupe. Copper and gold accents work well with teal, as do soft greens, especially in nature-inspired spaces. Used sparingly, yellow, pink and red also pair well with this unique shade.

Textures and materials

Combine teal green with light-colored natural materials, such as wood, bamboo or straw, to create a clean Scandinavian aesthetic. Pair it with metal and glass for a sleek, minimalist vibe, or opt for velvet, satin and dark wood to achieve a more refined, classic look.

Whether you use teal green on an accent wall, highlight it in a featured element like a kitchen island or add it in subtle touches (think curtains, vases and cushions), it's sure to add character to your space. Visit your local retailers for design inspiration.



“My laminate countertop is looking sad. How can I transform it without breaking the bank?”

Does your laminate kitchen countertop look like it's seen better days? Perhaps its style is simply outdated. Good news! If it's still sturdy, you don't have to replace it. There are several ways to give it a makeover. Here are some affordable options.

- **Paint it.** Painting is an easy and affordable way to transform your countertop. Proper surface preparation is key to a smooth, lasting finish, so start by cleaning, sanding and repairing any cracks. Then, apply a primer, followed by several thin coats of paint designed for laminate to achieve a smooth, lasting surface.
- **Cover it with self-adhesive vinyl.** You can

choose from a host of different finishes, including terrazzo, marble or wood. Simply measure the surface, cut the adhesive paper to the right size and apply it carefully to avoid air bubbles.

- **Coat it with concrete.** For a sophisticated, modern finish, apply a thin layer of concrete overlay. This method requires some skill, and you'll need to seal the surface with resin or varnish to protect it.

With these clever solutions, your old countertop can look as good as new. Visit your local home improvement stores to find everything you need.



How to renovate your kitchen without spending a fortune

Want to renovate your kitchen, but short on funds? Good news! You can refresh this crucial space in your home without spending your entire annual salary. Here are a few tips for renovating on a budget.

- **Cabinets.** Keep your cabinets if they're still in good condition. Paint them or cover them with a decorative film or wood veneer. Swap out the handles, and the transformation is complete.

- **Backsplash.** Avoid tearing out your backsplash and replacing it. Instead, refresh it with ceramic paint or a layer of concrete plaster for a modern look. If you don't have a backsplash, install decorative panels.

- **Island.** Give your island a new look by painting it or adding a signature wallpaper to the visible sides. Decorate the top with a few carefully chosen items, such as a utensil holder or cookbooks.

- **Flooring.** If your floor is scratched or stained, cover it with attractive vinyl flooring—there's an option for any taste or preference—or add an easy-to-clean rug.
- **Accessories.** Simple updates can make a big difference. New curtains, light fixtures, plants or shelves styled with decorative objects can completely change the look of your kitchen at a low cost.



Visit your local stores to find everything you need without breaking the bank.



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A home as unique as you are!

Welcoming spring into your home: a how-to guide

Are you tired of staying indoors to escape the winter cold? Is the grey landscape getting you down? Hang in there, because spring is just around the corner! While you wait for the warm weather to return, why not add a few springtime touches to your interior decor? Here's a handful of ideas to inspire you.

Greenery galore

Plants are more than decorative; they also help bring the outdoors in. Give your home that springtime feel by adding lots of plants in planters, colorful pots or even terrariums throughout your home.



When you think of spring, you likely envision flowers. Choose real flowers, if they're available, but artificial ones will also do the job. Display them in pretty vases on your dining room table, kitchen island, mantelpiece or entryway table. Spring classics, such as tulips, lilacs, lilies, peonies, hyacinths, daisies and apple blossoms, bring instant spring vibes.

Do you have a green thumb? If you love gardening, you can start dreaming of your well-stocked vegetable garden as you plant your seedlings. Watching them sprout is a sure sign of the arrival of warmer days.

As you can see, it's not hard to invite spring into your home. Visit your local home decor, furniture and paint retailers to find everything you need to make your decorating project a success.

Trendy colors

According to interior design experts, the following colors will be everywhere in homes in spring 2026:

- Peach pink
- Soft blue-grey
- Mint green
- Chocolate brown
- Powder pink
- Blue-green
- Sage green

That said, a host of other colors are also ideal for the season of renewal, including soft beiges and pastels. Use these shades on accent walls, textiles, decorative items and furniture to refresh your home from floor to ceiling.

Spring textiles

Swap your winter duvets, curtains, throws, cushion covers and other wintery items for lighter textiles. Choose fabrics with soft colors and springtime patterns like florals or playful motifs like woodland animals. A breath of fresh air, guaranteed!

Fragrant ambiance

Say "see you next year" to indoor spaces scented with notes of cinnamon, pine and cranberry. Time to switch to fruity and floral scents for your room sprays, reed diffusers and scented candles. Welcome scents of lemon, pear, lilac, lily of the valley and rose. It's starting to smell like spring!

Woven materials

Rattan, wicker and water hyacinth add texture and natural charm to any room. Choose baskets, trays or planters made of these organic materials to effortlessly enhance your decor.



Not confident in your decorating skills? Don't have time in your busy schedule? No worry! Hire an interior designer to create a spring-inspired look that will exceed your expectations.



A home as unique as you are!

Lighting tips for your home office

With remote and hybrid working arrangements becoming the norm, it's increasingly common for people to set up offices in their homes. Ergonomics and comfort are critical considerations, but remember that lighting plays an equally important role. Here are a few expert tips to help you get it just right.

Natural light

You can optimize your focus by maximizing sunlight exposure. If you can, place your desk near a window. However, make sure the sunlight doesn't hit your computer screen directly, as it can interfere with your ability to read. If you want to avoid glare at certain times of day, install blinds or opaque curtains.

Task lamps

Use multiple light sources to reduce shadows and sudden lighting contrasts that can cause eye strain. Combine ceiling lights with lamps placed at varying heights to balance and complement natural light throughout the day.

Preferred tones

Although warm lighting (yellow and orange tones) is pleasant on the eyes, it promotes relaxation. To help you stay focused, opt instead for cool lighting (white and bluish tones), which can be more energizing.

With these tips, you can easily adjust the lighting in your home office to suit your needs. Consult a lighting professional in your area for more advice.



Summer eating made simple

Think outside the box with your summer BBQs—delicious meals guaranteed!

Have you grown tired of your grilling classics? Are you ready to move beyond the hamburgers, hotdogs and shish kebabs and explore some new summer flavors? Tantalize your tastebuds and impress your guests with these seven suggestions that are as tasty as they are unique.



Cheese. Choose a grilling cheese like halloumi that responds well to heat. It'll need just a few minutes on the grill to get a crispy golden crust and a tender center. So delicious!

Oysters. Place them on the grill, rounded side down. When they open up, you'll know they're ready. Serve them with garlic butter, a few drops of lemon juice or hot sauce. Surprise your guests with this elegant appetizer.

Bananas. Cut a slit in the peel and press toppings, such as chocolate chips or marshmallows, into the flesh of the bananas. Grill them on a sheet of aluminum foil for a few minutes to get a luscious, decadent dessert.

Eggs. Crack a few eggs into a skillet and add vegetables and herbs. Cover the pan and place on the grill to cook over indirect heat. Cook just until the whites are set and the yolks are still slightly runny. This dish is perfect for brunch or a quick supper.

Cake. Cut slices of cake, such as angel food or pound cake, and heat them on the grill. Serve them with whipped cream and berries. This simple dessert is sure to wow your guests.

Check out your local farmers' market or grocery store to find excellent grilling foods to jazz up your next barbecue.

Peaches. Cut them in half and remove the pits. Lay them with the exposed flesh down on the grill. Serve them with yogurt, honey, nuts or a scoop of your favorite ice cream. Your choice of toppings is practically endless.

Watermelon. Lay thick slices directly on the grill. Just a few minutes are all you need for the sugars to caramelize. Serve them with feta cheese, fresh mint, lime juice or a drizzle of balsamic vinegar for a delectable burst of flavor.

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Servings: 4

Elegant prosciutto and arugula pizza

The refined flavors of Italy make this recipe perfect for a pleasant meal in good company.

Ingredients

- 1 flatbread, homemade or store bought
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons pesto
- 2 cups arugula
- 6 fresh figs, cut into quarters
- 8 slices prosciutto
- Parmesan cheese, shaved
- Pepper, freshly ground
- Herbs, dried (optional)

Directions

- Preheat the oven to 450 F. Place the flatbread on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
- Brush the bread with olive oil and pesto.
- Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the crust is golden brown.
- Garnish immediately with arugula, figs and torn prosciutto. Top with parmesan shavings, pepper and dried herbs, if desired.
- Cut into triangles and serve.

GREEN IDEAS

Are solar-powered homes cost-effective?

Are you concerned about your carbon footprint and considering solar panels to power your property? Are you wondering if this environmentally friendly solution is cost-effective? Here are some things to consider.

PAYBACK PERIOD

In recent years, photovoltaic panels have become increasingly affordable. However, depending on how much you spend upfront, it can take 15, 20 or even 30 years of reduced energy bills to make back your initial investment.



PROFITABILITY

The profitability of your solar panel setup depends on several factors, including where they're installed and how they're positioned. Solar panels can turn one kilowatt of power into approximately 1,200 kilowatt-hours of electricity in ideal conditions. You can use an online calculator to estimate how long it would take you to get your money's worth.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

On top of saving money over several years, using solar panels helps offset the demand for energy during the winter months. It also ensures you have power even if there's an outage.

If you want to find out if solar panels are right for you, contact an engineer or solar energy supplier in your area.

Light pollution: how it affects human health and how you can reduce it

Light pollution isn't just a hindrance to stargazers — it's a significant concern for human health and the environment. Here's what you need to know.

HOW DOES LIGHT POLLUTION AFFECT HUMANS?

Excessive artificial light at night can interfere with your natural sleep patterns and cause problems for both people and animals. This happens because the light influences your body's internal clock and can make it harder for you to fall asleep.

The body produces a hormone called melatonin, which helps you sleep. Melatonin is supposed to increase when it's dark. However, too much light at night can lower the amount of melatonin. The resulting lack of sleep can lead to health issues like tiredness, headaches and stress.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Here are a handful of things you can do to limit light pollution:

Use warm-toned, low-intensity bulbs for indoor and outdoor lighting to minimize the harsh blue light that disrupts circadian rhythms.

Ensure outdoor lights are properly shielded, directing light down instead of up into the sky.

Turn off unnecessary indoor lighting at night and install curtains, blinds or window films to prevent leakage of interior light into the night sky.

Install timers and motion sensors on outdoor lights to ensure they come on only when needed, reducing unnecessary light pollution.

Spread awareness about the effects of light pollution and encourage friends, family and community members to adopt light-friendly practices.

By understanding the impacts of light pollution and taking practical steps to reduce it, you can help create a healthier, more sustainable environment.

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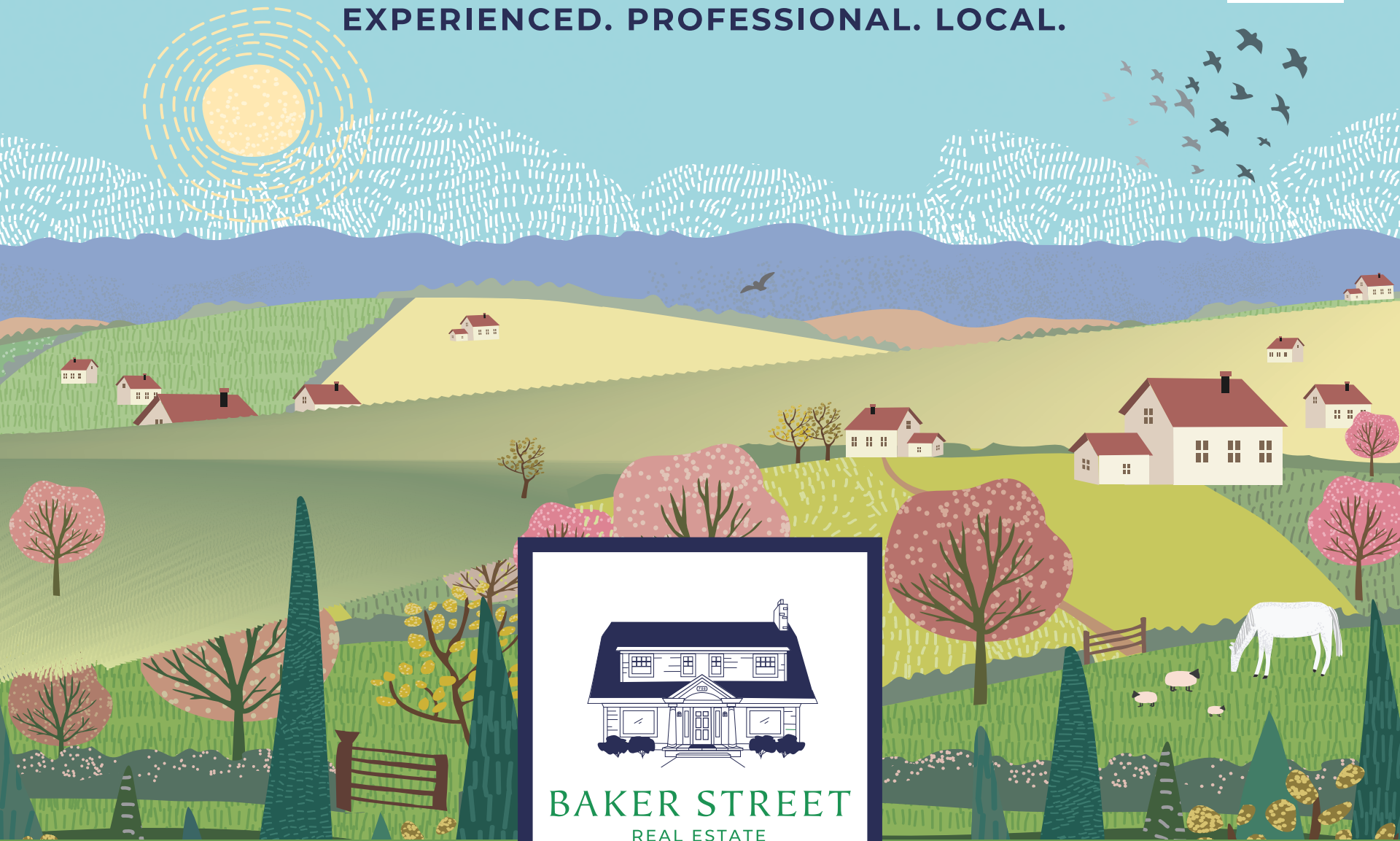
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