

# Nestled by the Fire

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OnGrowing Works  
DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION




When the folks at OnGrowing Works Ltd., a Canadian landscape design company, were called, their task was quite clear: to solve two landscaping issues while developing an outdoor living area that was to include a rather unique element—a massive fireplace.

The client's existing expansive backyard was really not something one might find all that appealing, nor did it beckon one to move from the house to the yard. The two reasons: the grass was boggy, and there was a rolling uphill slope to contend with. So, they brought their best ideas to the table and conceived a solution.

In addition to solving the grass and sloping issues, continuity as one traveled from the house to the fireplace was essential. Before, there was nothing to attract attention. Now, there is a

seamless transition from the planter beds to the fireplace. As you face the back of the house, your senses are uninterrupted as they enjoy the view.

Being able to look out from the back deck and gaze upon a vignette that blends well with the scenery made the design and selection of the materials quite important. The fireplace was created to give the impression that it had been in place for an extended period of time—similar to what one might find in the ruins of an old home. The stone on the fireplace and the patio was selected based on the natural qualities in keeping with this “historic” feeling. Charmin—the stone selected—is known for its smooth and/or rough textures and can be used singularly or in combination. It also comes in a wide range of colors including white, gold, brown, pinky/purple, and even pastel blue with



gold/silver highlights.

Being in Canada, where the weather can be...well...quite cold, an outdoor fireplace seems like something that would have limited usage. But this isn't the case. This area of Southern Alberta is known for a weather phenomenon called "Chinook winds." When it occurs, temperature can rise anywhere from 10 to 30 degrees and a foot of snow can vanish in a day. With between 30 and 35 Chinook days a year, an outdoor living area becomes an enjoyable, usable space in spite of the typical weather conditions.

Another factor to take into account when designing an outdoor room that includes plants is the native animal population. In other words, how do you keep the local wildlife out of your plantings?

"In a project such as this, blending the new landscaping with the existing surroundings is important," says Bill Hillary, landscape designer for OnGrowing Works Ltd., who worked alongside Bruce Kay and Nicole Jaggard on the project. "Plain and simple: Animals need to eat, and stumbling across a yard that offers all the wonderful things they love to nibble is like an open buffet. This is understandable since the plants may be exactly what they eat while roaming in the wild."

Working around this just takes a bit of forethought. "The size of the plant can make a difference," Hillary says. "The smaller the plant, the more likely that a deer or elk can walk up, reach down for a quick bite, and end up pulling the entire plant right out of the ground and carrying it off. Thus, using larger, mature plants helps to minimize this problem. Plus, it gives the appearance that the natural elements have been around for a long time." ■

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