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The weather is perfect, the kids are playing, the quests are arriving.

The only thing that can kill the mood of a great backyard get-together is a grill that won't fire up. Thankfully, a professional propane installation can go way beyond the grill, powering the backyard of your dreams.

ULTIMATE AL FRESCO

More than 60 percent of homeowners who grill outdoors choose a gas grill for its fast heating and the added benefit of fewer greenhouse gas emissions than charcoal. Opting for a built-in design with a dedicated propane line eliminates the inconvenience of bulky 20-pound tank replacements at odd intervals.

Bob Knight, president of Paul Homes in Cape Coral, Florida, says the built-in grill is just the beginning of what propane can do for a "summer kitchen." "We install the grill, a granite top, bar sink, fridge — they're all built in and can withstand the weather," he says. Indeed, the outdoor kitchen has become the entertainment heart of the back yard.

FIREPLACES & FIRE PITS

A cold beer or a nice glass of wine makes a perfect accompaniment to another popular propane-fueled backyard feature: the fire pit. Knight says fireplaces and fire pits are so popular that some of his clients install one unit in their initial design, then add stubbed propane lines in other areas for future fire features. These could include traditional fireplaces, pizza ovens, or restaurant-style propane patio heating.

FIRE & WATER

In the same way fireplaces and fire pits extend the season for enjoying the backyard, propane-powered pool heaters extend swimming season well beyond Labor Day weekend. Pool and spa heaters are being built with more efficiency in mind, with some models reaching 95 percent efficiency and delivering twice the heating rate of electric heat pump water heaters. Manufacturer Inyo Pools notes that a gas heater will heat a pool five to seven times faster than a heat pump, will cost less in doing so, and will work when air temperatures are below 40 degrees, making them suitable for installation in northern states.



DID YOU KNOW?

Depending on the fixture, a patio heater can raise outdoor air temperature between 10 and 30 degrees across a space up to 20 feet in diameter.