

The BBQ Grill Outlet

QUALITY GRILLS, ISLANDS & MORE

7 Keys to the Perfect BBQ Island

Designing a BBQ Island should be easy, but often can present some interesting challenges. How big should it be? Where should it be placed in the yard? Which way does the grill face? How much space should be allowed between appliances? How tall and deep should the island be?

Reviewing these 7 Keys to designing the perfect BBQ Island will be helpful: Grill Positioning, Island Shape & Placement, Appliance Layout, Critical Dimensions, Construction & Finish Materials, Utilities and Finishing Touches.

Grill Positioning

The Grill is normally the focal point of the BBQ Island. Where it's positioned is an important decision for several reasons including view, wind and smoke.

1. The grill is best located downwind from where your guests will be sitting so they don't get smoked out.
2. The back of the grill is the "messy" part of the grill and the least attractive. Try to position the grill so the back is hidden to some degree. If you plan to have seating around the island, guests will not want to sit behind the BBQ, especially when you are grilling.
3. The evening breeze should not blow against the back of the grill. The back of the grill is the "exhaust pipe". A breeze from behind the grill makes the grilling temperature uneven.
4. If you have a pool and young children, positioning the grill so the chef can see the pool when they are grilling may be a higher priority than other considerations.

Island Shape & Placement

Shaping the island is a major consideration. The shape has a big impact on how the island functions, its cost, the look and to some degree the entire backyard. Some island shapes are determined by budget or by space and that tends to make things easier. When you have room and multiple location options, determining the size and shape can be a bigger challenge.

1. Creating a "wish list" for the appliances you want is a great starting point. The number of

appliances will determine the minimum size of the island. This is good to do in inches: adding up the width of the appliances and the preferred spacing between them will determine the minimum island length.

2. If you plan to include seating with your island, attempt to give your guests the best view of the yard. If the view from the barstools is the neighbors fence its less interesting than if they were facing the pool.
3. If the yard is all squares and rectangles the island can either complement the shape or contrast with arches and curves. Neither choice is right or wrong, but worthy of consideration.
4. The evening breeze comes into consideration again. Even if the grill placement is correct in the island, the island placement should be such that smoke will not blow into the house.
5. Access to utilities often helps position the island. If the preferred spot results in a large invoice from a plumber to run a gas line, a second choice that does not require a plumber may be the right call.

Appliance Layout

How the appliances are positioned in the island can make a big difference in maximizing functionality. Think about separating the BBQ Island into sections; prepping, cooking, serving and entertaining. In a smaller island some sections may serve dual purposes such as prepping and serving.

1. Try keeping the “hot” appliances together and the cold appliances together. The grill and sideburner in one area and the sink & refrigerator close to the seating.
2. If possible allow a minimum of 9”, preferably 12” of counter space on each side of the grill and sideburner. This allows space to place a plate or platter on both sides of the appliances.
3. The seating is the entertaining area and should be close to the “cold” appliances such as the blender, ice chest, beverage center or refrigerator.
4. The refrigerator is more functional if it’s easily accessed by others without interrupting the chef. Locate it so the chef does not have to move away from the grill.
5. Access doors are important under appliances with water and sewer connections. Down the road you may need to change a faucet or repair a leaky drain line. Sinks, ice chests and beverage centers fall into this category.
6. If your gas shut-off valve is inside the island you will need a door to access the gas line (usually under the grill). If your contractor places the gas shut-off valve outside the island, it eliminates the need for door there making room for another appliance such as a warming drawer.
7. Two items that are easy to miss, but highly valued are counter space and storage drawers. Counter space to prep food, serve drinks and to serve food buffet style.

Drawers to house the cooking utensils, rotisserie motor, wood chips and smoker box.

Critical Dimensions

Dimensions are another major consideration when designing an island and here are some important ones to take into consideration:

1. 36" tall counters are a norm for kitchens inside and outside. Of course they can be made taller or shorter, but most people are comfortable cooking at that height.
2. Barstools, counter stools and dining chairs are designed to work best when the bar tops are 42" - 44" (barstools), counters are 36" – 38" (counter stools) and dining at 29" – 31" (dining chairs). If the counter surface is taller or shorter than those dimensions you will have a difficult time finding stools or chairs that sit comfortably.
3. The island depth needs to be deep enough to house the appliances and deep enough for the "hood throw" on the BBQ. This is critical when there is a wall or backsplash behind the grill. BBQ hoods need extra space in back to fully open, greater than the depth of the grill itself. All the grills we sell have ample room to open with an island depth of at least 28".
4. For bar seating, figure the bar top to be approximately 18" as a general guide, it can be less. This makes an island with a bar top behind it, approximately 46", almost 4 feet. To make room for your knees, the underside (cantilever) should be minimum 10", but 12" to 14" preferred.
5. For seating you should allow a width of 30" per chair or stool. For example a 5 foot long bartop (60") will comfortably seat 2 people. 30" is enough room for most stools to swivel. For depth behind the chair, allow 4 feet from the edge of the bartop to a wall or the edge of a patio. That leaves enough room for someone to use the chair and another to walk behind.
6. If the island has a "U" shape or is closed in by the house or wall, its best to leave a minimum of 4 feet inside the galley. 3 feet will work, but it starts to make the quarters feel tight.

Construction and Finish Materials

There are basically two options in building an island with an unlimited number of finish materials that can be used to complete it. Well built islands are constructed with either cinder block or exterior rated galvanized steel studs.

1. Our preference is galvanized steel stud and cement board. To build a permanent structure the steel studs must be a minimum 20 gauge (very thick) and galvanized 60 (heavily galvanized). The large home improvement stores sell thin and lightly galvanized steel studs for interior framing. These studs will begin rusting almost immediately. To make the island frame even stronger, we recommend welding the steel studs instead of screwing them together.

2. The choice of the cement board is also important. There is only one sold in the U.S. that has an outdoor warranty and it's PermaBase. Use only 1/2" cement board to wrap the island, never 1/4" board.
3. Cinderblock is another way to build a permanent structure and works just fine. There are two drawbacks to cinderblock that makes us prefer steel stud and cement board: mold and expense. Cinderblock retains moisture and the inside of an island is warm, dark & moist; a perfect environment for mold. Once the footings are poured, making changes to cinderblock construction is expensive. Otherwise it's a perfectly acceptable construction method.
4. Construction Methods to avoid. There are really only two; never use wood to frame a BBQ Island and never purchase an island that is built in a factory and craned into your yard. Those products are inferior choices with mid and long term consequences.
5. Countertop finishes are almost unlimited: granite slab, granite tile, concrete, porcelain tile, slate, flagstone, travertine and quartz stone. Major considerations are grout lines, porous materials that require sealing (concrete, slate, quartz, flagstone & travertine) and ones that don't (granite & porcelain). Tile pieces of any material are less expensive than solid/slab material. Porcelain tile is the most permanent material for outside use and there are many good choices.
6. Be careful with manufactured slabs that are likely to fade with sun exposure.
7. A dark countertop material can be very hot with direct exposure to the sun.
8. Finishes for the side of the island are some usually stucco, plaster (less expensive) or stone (more expensive). If possible it's best to use real stone for two reasons: you can clean off sauce or grease stains with a wire brush and a cut edge of a manufactured stone is not colored (less attractive).
9. If you plan to use stone on the side of your island, the countertop needs to overhang the sides by at least the thickness of the rock. The island looks best when the countertop sits over the stone.
10. If stucco is used, consider adding a 3" to 4" kick plate of countertop material around the base of the island to protect the stucco from standing water.
11. If you prefer stone sides and are looking for ways to cut cost, consider using stucco on the side(s) of the island that is less visible and stone on the side(s) that is more visible.

Utilities

Getting the required utilities to the BBQ Island can be expensive but very useful. With the use of propane gas, you can build a fully functioning BBQ island without any utilities. However most islands will have electricity and natural gas brought to them.

1. Of all the utilities, electricity is the most useful. Most of the premium grills require electricity as does a rotisserie motor, refrigerator, lighting and sound systems.
2. Natural gas is the second most useful utility. All of the appliances can work with propane gas but it makes life easier not having to fill and refill the tanks.

3. The length of a gas line and the BTU consumption of the appliances will determine the correct diameter for the gas line. Plumbers have a formula to determine pipe diameter and it's important that the diameter is correct for the grill to perform properly.
4. If you plan to have sink, bringing water to the island is usually easier and less expensive than bringing a sewer line for the drain.
5. Selecting the location for electrical outlets to operate the rotisserie motor, blender or coffee pot is important. You want to think about where the cord will run when plugged in and attempt to place the outlet so the cord is out of the way.
6. Utility lines, pipes and conduit need to be accessible, but out of the way of the appliances. This is particularly important for appliances that are deep, like refrigerators and drawers. This takes some careful planning and it's important to think in 3 dimensions, visualizing how the appliance will fill the space inside the island.

Finishing Touches

You have selected your appliances, made the tough choices about finish materials and colors, determined heights and depths, chose just the right shape and now you are almost done. Here are a few finishing touches that can greatly improve the use and look of your new BBQ Island.

1. Lighting is one of those things that can both make the island more attractive and functional. Consider countertop lighting even if your grill has lights inside. Where you prep food or make drinks may benefit from being well lit. Additionally there are some wonderful options for under counter lighting, accent lights in a backsplash or foot path lighting on the body of the island.
2. You may already have a source for music in your backyard, but if not, the island presents itself as a great opportunity. There are some wonderful weather proof sound systems that can be housed on the island including an iPod docking station, speakers and sub-woofer.
3. Tables are a nice addition to the island with or without additional bar seating. If you are considering a table, a nice option is to include a fire pan in the center of the table. Now your table can be used as a firepit to extend the evening with close friends and family.

Our design centers are staffed with talented BBQ Island designers. All of our design work is complimentary including 3 dimensional scaled drawings. Please come visit us at any store. We are open 7 days a week, normally 10AM to 5PM, check the website for seasonal hours of operation. www.bbqgrillsandislands.com or by phone 714 540 1594 – 949 455 0040