

SUMMER READY TECH

Transform your garden into a high-tech entertaining space
that's fit for a party



Words by Courtney Goldsmith



Chelsea Flower Show garden designed by Hay Jung Hwang with lighting from John Cullen Lighting, johncullenlighting.com

Smart technology has transformed our lives indoors: we can now talk to our TVs and washing machines and unlock our front doors with only a smartphone. These handy gadgets simplify and connect our busy lives – and they’ve become must-have features for any modern home.

With the summer months just around the corner, there’s no longer any reason to limit this next-level connectivity to the indoors alone. Taking the smart home outside will not only impress your guests, but it is also a valuable investment into your home. “Alongside enabling your garden to be used in whole new ways – as an extension of your home for entertaining and relaxing – the addition of outdoor smart home technology has the potential to increase the resale value of a property,” says William Hopkins, the CEO of Intrinsic Group Limited, which owns smart tech specialist Your Smart Home. It sounds like there’s never been a better time to smarten up your garden.

Light the way

Outdoor smart tech isn’t an entirely new concept, and the product that’s paving the way for homeowners is smart lighting. Already an essential choice for interiors, smart bulbs, which can be controlled via your smartphone or your voice, give homeowners added – and automated – control over the feel of their space. “Smart outdoor lighting has the ability to create ambiance and mood, while allowing the homeowner to take advantage of outdoor areas that previously would have been unused in the evening as extensions of the indoors,” William explains.

As well as automatically lighting up your garden and creating a feature of your plants in the evenings, smart outdoor lights can also bring the concept of task lighting outside. Typically used in kitchens, task lights such as spotlights and under-cabinet lighting are installed above worktops so they can be used for specific jobs. This idea can be applied to a spacious garden by creating lighting designated for certain areas, such as a dining space or a quiet corner to read in.

Party ready

You can’t have a summer party without music, so finding water-resistant smart outdoor speakers is essential. Amp up any get together with a speaker that will not only please the audiophiles but will also survive a dunk in the pool – audio brand Ultimate Ears has made strides in this area with its waterproof designs. Surround-sound systems can also be installed with in-ground subwoofers for those who are deadly serious about their sound quality. “These really help ensure that garden parties sound just as good as those in the house,” William says. “The addition of the subwoofer helps to fill out the sound that is often lost outdoors.”

To ensure your outdoor entertainment system will be the envy of all of your guests, take it a step further with a TV designed to withstand the elements. SunBriteTV makes weatherproof televisions that have much brighter screens than traditional TVs so that they can be used in partial or direct sunlight on a patio or under a pergola. As well as being fitted out with impact-resistant glass screens and UV resistance, the TVs are made with rust-proof powder coated aluminium to help protect from rain, snow, dust, insects, humidity and salty air.



SunBriteTV, prices from £1,173, sunbritev.com

When the summer weather hits, there's nothing better than enjoying a meal *alfresco*, and smart tech is here to upgrade your outdoor dining experience. Smart barbecues, such as the Traeger Timberline 1300 wood-fire grill, will help you cook your food to perfection. With features such as WiFi connectivity, users can monitor temperatures, set timers and receive alerts on their smartphones. Don't forget to invest in handy smart tools, too, such as a smart thermometer or Grillbot, which is – you guessed it – a grill-cleaning robot. When the temperature rises, you'll want to keep yourself cool. A handy drink chiller, such as the Cooper Cooler Rapid Beverage Chiller, could be just the thing your garden party's missing. The chiller cools drinks in a flash – specifically, one minute for a can of beer or six minutes for a bottle of wine.

Worry free tech

The joy of outdoor smart tech is that once installed, there's very little upkeep. "Professional smart home solutions are designed to be outdoors all year round, the only exception being in certain extreme climates, but the average UK temperature range is not really a concern," says William. But when it comes to installation, consult the experts. This will ensure that you don't suffer any connectivity issues, as well as taking into consideration security (you don't want your outdoor kit being stolen) and safety (especially where electrics and water are concerned).

Once a niche market, outdoor smart tech is now following in the footsteps of its indoor counterpart, with an explosion of interest fuelling the fire for more and more innovative products. "Today, more manufacturers are realising the potential of outdoor technology, so we're seeing a wider range of solutions of a higher quality, both in terms of better sound and also better vision," William says. With an exterior that's just as smart as your interior, you've got your summer soirées sorted.

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WILLIAM HOPKINS, YOUR SMART HOME