

# LET'S TAKE THIS OUTSIDE

*Crack open the Pimms, light the barbie and pull out the parasols – summer's here and Bath interior designer Clair Strong has some great tips for making your garden soirées even more special*



CONSIDER YOURSELF AT HOME: throw a few cushions around those hard garden chairs – these are from Raj Tent Club



Find your place in the sun: parasol, table and chairs from Raj Tent Club, online shop: [rajtentclub.com](http://rajtentclub.com)



Skagerak Helios fire bowl from Salcombe Trading, Broad Street, Bath

## LIGHT THE WAY

If you want the fun to continue late into the evening, you'll need light. The right kind of lighting is important: you want it to be practical – keeping guests safe from trip hazards, allowing them to see their food, etc – but atmospheric. Candles, string lights and lanterns are all great options for adding a little flair to your affair.

A combination of all three is ideal: string lights for an overhead glow, candles in gorgeous Scandi-style votives from Shannon, and lanterns lighting the paths. And, this is personal preference, but I usually opt for solar lights, they're far more economical and can be safer than electric lights.

But for something really special, a fire pit is a real crowd-pleaser, providing light and warmth on cool summer evenings. Gather round, toast some marshmallows and reminisce about the good old days. I like the Skagerak Helios Fire Bowl, available at Salcombe Trading; its smaller size makes it suitable for any garden or terrace.



Black by Design Sirius LED Aura lantern from [black-by-design.co.uk](http://black-by-design.co.uk)



### SET THE SCENE

The great thing about a garden party is that you don't need to go all-out decorating. The garden itself does the hard work for you. If it's a really special occasion – a birthday or anniversary party for example – and you want to decorate, keep it simple. I like a playful, tropical vibe in the garden. Especially for more relaxed gatherings. Think pineapple garlands strung between trees, quirky flamingo lawn ornaments and, if kids are present, maybe even a piñata.

If you're throwing an outdoor dinner party and want to keep things tasteful, opt for linen table cloths and candles in glass votives. Add a few fresh cuttings from the garden in glass vases and lay the table before everyone arrives. For a really sophisticated touch, create place settings for each guest.



Melamine plates by Rice DK at Sisters Guild, web: sistersguild.com



Cocktail cart in rose gold from Sisters Guild



MADECOM Catania lounge set, web: MADE.com

### BE SEATED

Too little seating and some guests will be left standing all evening, too spread out and people will find it difficult to mingle. The idea is to create a comfortable, relaxed vibe that encourages guests to linger. A casual party calls for blankets, cushions and bean bags for guests to lounge on, festival style. I like Fatboy's all-weather bean bags available at TR Hayes; they're huge, comfortable and virtually indestructible. They come in a great range of colours too. If lounging on the grass isn't your style, consider still-casual-but-classy outdoor sofas and chairs. Arrange them in groups around low tables to give a cosy, intimate feel to your party. I love MADE.com's outdoor furniture; it boasts some unique, ultra-stylish designs.



Fat Boy cushions from TR Hayes, Walcot



Drinks dispenser by Grace and Glory, web: graceandgloryhome.co.uk

### DINING OUT

Keeping guests well-fed and watered is your most important job as host. I usually provide the food, soft drinks and a large pitcher or two of Pimms but ask guests to BYOB. This takes some of the pressure – and cost – off you. A garden party might not be the best place to use your finest china, but you can still show-off your stylish side. Forgo the paper plates, and opt for functional melamine instead. Rice DK (from sistersguild.com) offers beautiful melamine tableware in chic floral prints. As for that pitcher of Pimms, you can't go wrong with the Grace and Glory drinks dispenser. Made from glass, it has a tap for serving and will hold up to 8½ litres of your favourite cocktail. It's the little details that will make your party one to remember. Just don't forget the cocktail umbrellas!



Sophie Allport Limited Pheasant print picnic accessories, web: sophieallport.com