Build a DIY fire pit in two hours or less

By Rachael Liska
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The calendar says it's nearly autumn, but you have plenty to time to enjoy the outdoors — even well into November.

Make the most of the remaining beautiful autumn weather with a do-it-yourself project that will help entertain friends and family long after summer's warm weather says goodbye.

This September, give summer the send-off it deserves with a backyard bonfire using this stacked-stone fire pit that can be built in less than two hours.

What you'll need:

24 granite retaining-wall stones (6½ × 8 × 14 inches) or other nonporous stone

Sand

How to:

Step 1: Mark a circular area in the yard big enough for a fire pit (4 to 5 feet is good). Cut out the sod and scrape out the first 2 inches of soil. Spread an inch of sand over the ground and rake it smooth, leveling the area where the fire pit will sit.

Step 2: Working from the outer edge of your circle, lay blocks flat on the sand, then level. Leave about a half-inch gap between blocks for air vents. Move the stones as needed for even spacing.

Step 3: Add a second layer of stone, straddling the joints of the first layer. If a stone doesn't sit flat, add more sand under the skewed stone in the first course, then tap or wiggle it flat.

Step 4: After the stones are set, add a few inches of sand or gravel inside the pit to raise the level of the fire so it's easier to tend.

Tips for entertaining around your new fire pit:

■ When setting up a seating area, select easy-to-move items. That way, if wind sends the smoke to where it starts to bother your guests, they can relocate without a lot of fuss.

■ Cook over the open flame. Take roasted hot dogs to another level with toppings such as Camembert, Dijon mustard and sliced pear, or serve gourmet sausages on pretzel rolls. Give s'mores a special makeover too, by using unusual ingredients such as dark chocolate, Caramello candy bars, flavored marshmallows or even previously cooked bacon.

■ From sticks to crystals, there are a number of campfire novelty items on the market that produce colorful flames in shades of red, turquoise, violet and green. We found Seymour Color Flame Crystals at a hardware store. Give one a try.

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