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YOUR SECOND HOME | OUTDOOR MUSIC SYSTEMS
Speakers of the House



Nancy Doniger

By BILLIE COHEN
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ACCORDING to [Beethoven](#), [music](#) can change the world. And even if you're not blasting his Ninth Symphony, he was right — especially when it comes to the world in your own backyard. Fortunately, installing an outdoor stereo system is easy.

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bushes and trees.

When placing them, consider not only where you will be sitting, but also where your neighbors will be. "Someone might think putting the speakers near the house facing out to the backyard is a good solution," said Michael Alpert, president of Nantucket Media Systems, an audio-video design and installation company. "But that will carry over to the next house. A good solution is to put speakers on the perimeter of your property and face them toward the house." That way, he said, you get good sound coverage, and the people next door don't get angry.

In larger yards, don't rely on one pair of speakers to cover the whole area. "If you have a long patio, say 100 feet, it's going to be hard to put a speaker on each side," explained Dave Chai, president of Outdoor Speaker Depot, an online seller of equipment based in Brea, Calif. "You'd have to raise the volume up a lot to get adequate sound."

Instead, he said, create separate zones by placing pairs of speakers in separate areas. And since most outdoor speakers do not deliver great bass, consider adding a subwoofer. Many outdoor varieties sink into the ground, out of the way.

Whatever you choose, though, avoid any urge to use the indoor speakers you already own. "Those materials are not built for outdoor use; the sun and moisture will kill it," Mr. Chai said. "You can use

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outdoor speakers for indoors, but not the other way around.”

The next step, of course, is connecting the speakers to your stereo system. “There are three ways to go about this,” said Gary Altunian, who has worked for 30 years in the consumer-electronics business and is the guide for stereos at [About.com](#). Your first and second choices are the typical home-stereo receiver (which has two channels, left and right) and the home-theater receiver (which has five channels).

“If you walk into a Best Buy or Circuit City, that’s what you’ll be shown,” he said of those two options. And those work fine: just run a wire from the stereo to the speakers, add a waterproof radio-frequency remote control (instead of infrared), and you’re good to go. But, he explained, the third, and better, option is what’s called a multizone receiver, which allows Mom and her friends to listen to a CD in the living room, while Uncle Ned and the rest of the guests groove to satellite radio outside. Some of these setups even have eight or more zones.

Multiroom audio receivers are generally sold by system integrators or custom installers, Mr. Altunian noted, so you won’t find them on a showroom floor. Vendors are easy enough to find, however. Ask a friend whose setup you admire, or, Mr. Alpert suggested, search [www.cedia.net](#), the site of the Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association, for licensed installers.

“Unless you know how to pull wires through the walls,” installing an outdoor system is not simple, Mr. Altunian said. “It’s nothing a novice would want to do. You don’t want to drill into electrical wiring, which could cause shock and injury, and you want to make sure you don’t mistakenly drill through the wall.”

And unfortunately, while wireless speakers seem like a great D.I.Y. option, they still lag behind the conventional variety in sound quality. “Wireless may be good if you’re indoors and only within 20 or 30 feet,” Mr. Altunian said, “but if you’re talking 50, 75, 100 feet, you might run into interference problems and a weak signal.” But, he added, “it’s only a matter of time before the technology catches up with the need.”

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