SOCIETY OF GARDEN + LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS

Sustainability Guidance Notes

22nd September 2019

Note No. 024: Patio heaters & Fire pits

Guidance Notes are intended to examine the sustainability or otherwise of types of materials, products and practices currently used by designers and the landscape industry at large.

A list of pros and cons is presented, together with references where available for further reading.

No reference is made or to be inferred to any company, brand or trademark.

The SGLD may make a recommendation or have a preferred position on the use or non-use of the material in question.

Introduction

In our sometimes chilly climate, a source of warmth on the patio may make lingering in the garden a more attractive proposition. However, most of these patio heaters run on gas or electricity, so there is a direct environmental consequence in the use of fossil fuels and the release of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.

Fire pits that burn wood have the potential to be carbon neutral, depending upon the source of fuel. They are not without their problems, however.

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Patio Heaters

Positives

Personal

- Warmth when needed to extend the outdoor social time

Environmental

- None

Negatives

Personal

- Slight potential of burns

Environmental

- Burning of fossil fuels
- Carbon emissions

Fire Pits

Positives

Personal

- Warmth when needed to extend the outdoor social time
- Relaxing ambiance
- The mesmeric experience of fire

Environmental

- Carbon neutral if the wood is locally and sustainably sourced. Coppice wood re-grows and the trees rapidly re-absorb carbon on a (typical) 15 year cycle. Compressed wood pellets from sawdust are also available, which may smoke less. Not positive from an environmental point of view, just not entirely negative. See --->

Negatives

Personal

- Labour
- Potential for burns
- Smoke and sparks
- Pollution and health hazard. Smoke is toxic and carcinogenic.
- Can be unpleasant for neighbours

Environmental

- Smoke is a pollutant, especially in urban are-as where (if not prohibited) it can be a health hazard for neighbours.
- Wood must be from a sustainable source. Use of urban woodstoves (indoors) has in-creased demand for wood, which can lead to excessive & unnecessary removal of trees.

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Recommendations

There are no environmental positives for any kind of exterior heating, the benefits are all personal. Given that we could all just put on an extra jumper, fossil-fuel using appliances are hard to justify and so best avoided

Fire pits, bowls and chimeneas that burn wood can be positive or negative, depending on the factors outlined. Given that there are primeval "staring into the fire" aspects that may re-connect us with deeper elements of life, these can be good. Use with care.

References and further reading

The following links may be useful:

Patio Heaters:

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2005/oct/11/shopping.ethicalmoney

https://www.treehugger.com/renewable-energy/why-patio-heaters-are-environmental-obscenities.html

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/emissions/3301531/Patio-heaters-targeted-over-CO2-emissions.html

Fire Pits:

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fire-pit-environmental-dangers/

https://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/05/24/environment/fire-pits-get-new-scrutiny