

Make your condo balcony an urban haven

Most condo and apartment balconies are barren spaces surrounded by dull, grey concrete, steel and glass. They're not very inviting. And that's probably why most of us don't use them very often.

But why not use every inch of your little piece of urban real estate to its fullest? If your

building's rules allow you to, the experts at Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse offer a range of suggestions to maximize your living space by creating a cozy outdoor haven.

A concrete floor isn't very welcoming. Adding a small outdoor area rug will make it comfortable for your bare feet.

Look for small-scale furniture that is both comfortable and functional. A cushioned corner chair or lounge at one end of a balcony gives you a place to read a book or take a breezy nap.

A small bistro table and two chairs tucked into another corner create a relaxing nook for your morning tea or evening glass of wine.

If you have the space and a suitable corner, two short storage benches or deck boxes and a square table form a dining booth for entertaining.

Whatever furnishings you choose, make sure your seating is comfortable. If your current chairs don't have padding, invest in a few washable outdoor cushions. Then add some outdoor pillows and throw blankets.

Don't be afraid to choose bright colours and fun designs. A balcony is for relaxing and

entertaining, so it should be friendly and inviting!

If you'll be using your patio at night, the right lantern or outdoor candle can create a warm, relaxing ambiance.

A tiny garden can also add some life to your balcony. Many potted flowers and plants – including tomatoes, peppers and herbs – thrive in small spaces.

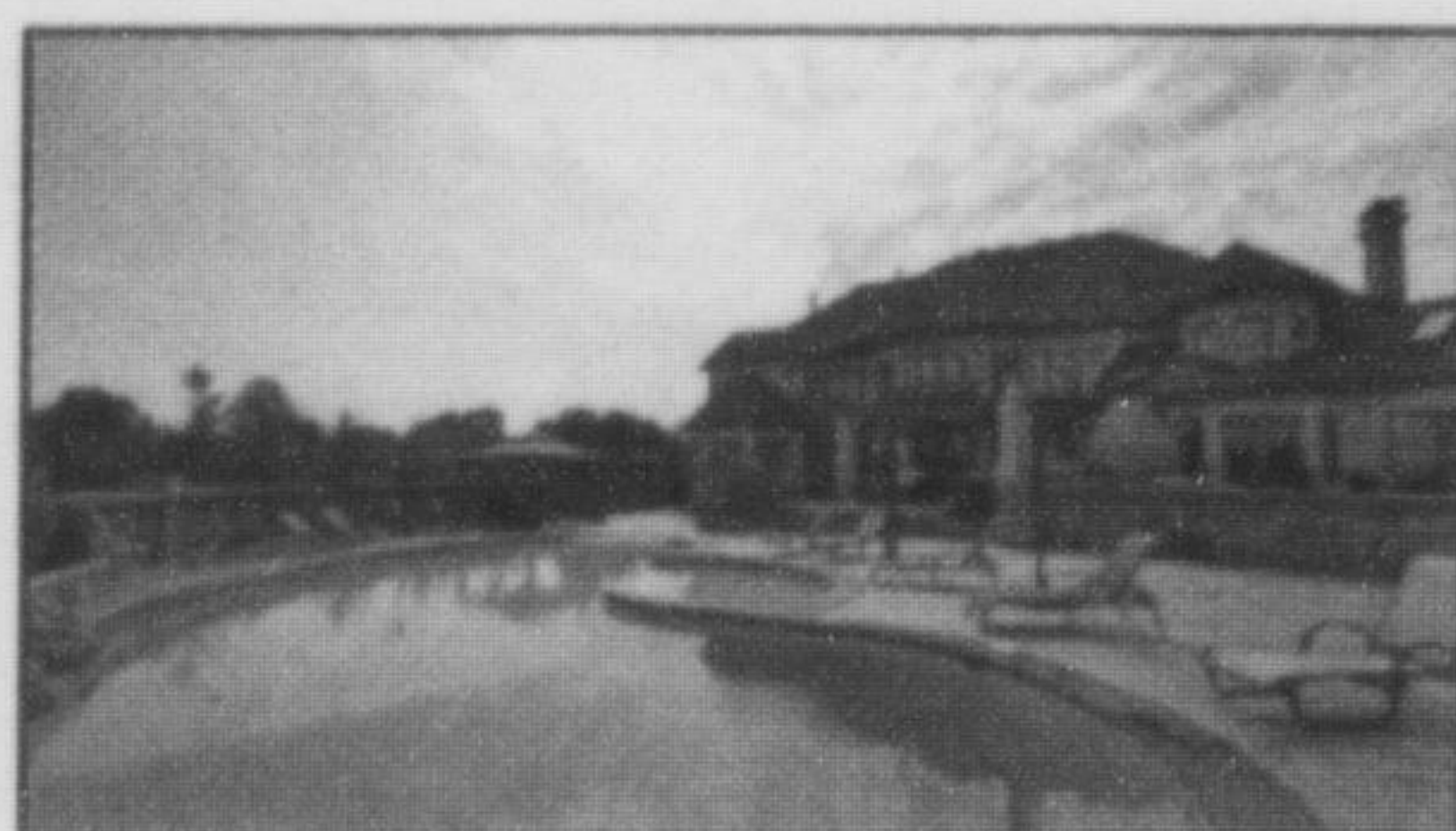
"For a little variety, combo planters are great for creating balcony gardens, and they come in a range of colours and styles," says Sarah Skeates, a Merchandising Specialist with Lowe's. "If you don't have space for a garden, a hanging wall bag adds a splash of colour to any outside wall space."

Now that Spring is here, it's time to get started with turning that dreary condo patio into an urban haven! www.newscanada.com



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