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A home spa offers the ultimate in relaxation

By Annette M. Stockley

What's wrong with this picture? Have my husband and I gone mad? On this frosty 20-degree January evening, the wind is whipping through the treetops, there is snow and ice on the ground and we are outside in our bathing suits. There's nothing wrong with this picture! We are soaking in our steamy spa, enjoying a most beautiful and magical sky. The night and stars are so tranquil — and we have never spent so much quality time together in any season.

A portable spa (spa, hot tub, Jacuzzi — all the same) can take away your winter blues, soothe your aches and pains, and allow you to enjoy the great outdoors while spending quality time with your significant other or fun time with family and friends. The perfect time to enjoy a spa is during cooler outdoor temperatures in autumn, winter and spring.

Our spa is the perfect escape after a stress-filled workday. The jets massage, swirl and pulsate (gently or vigorously) our sore

muscles and tired feet by using hydrotherapy (a perfect blend of 50 percent air and 50 percent water). We indulge ourselves with pure and simple relaxation in the privacy of our own backyard.

Still having trouble picturing yourself using a spa on a 20-degree night? Afraid you'll be too cold? Well, you will be chilly only until you immerse yourself. Once in our spa, the wind can be whipping around our heads but we feel toasty warm from the 100-degree spa water and rising steam. After our luxurious soak, we are still warm enough to add the appropriate sanitizing products and secure the spa cover without feeling an urgency to get indoors. In fact, on the winter nights we use our spa, I simply cannot wear my favorite flannel pajamas because I am already toasty warm.

Although a few individuals set up their spa indoors (usually in a bedroom or sunroom), in my opinion the best location for a spa is outdoors, to allow you to take advantage of the great contrast of air temperature versus water temperature. Soaking in a warm cozy spa

that is situated in a warm cozy house does not feel very appealing (think of taking a hot shower on a humid, 90-degree day). Besides, a spa releases a vast amount of humidity into the air — humidity that can steam up windows and damage furniture.

Since the best location for a spa is outdoors and the peak season for using a spa is in cooler weather, it stands to reason that your spa needs to be very well insulated. The most energy-efficient insulation method is full-foam. A fully-foamed spa has the entire cavity between the spa shell and outside cabinet encased in varying degrees of compressed foam. Not all spas are insulated with this method because it's a time-consuming and expensive process. But you can expect a fully-foamed spa to cost approximately \$30 per month to operate, whereas a spa insulated in other ways can cost as much as \$100 or more per month to operate!

Other methods of spa insulation include air locks, removable Styrofoam wall panels, sprayed-on foam or foil vapor barriers. My favorite analogy to use when comparing spa-insulating methods is describing the insulation in the walls of our homes. The fully-insulated walls of our homes are more energy efficient than our air-lock thermopane windows because the entire wall cavity is filled with insulation.

When choosing the perfect spa for your lifestyle, a few factors need to be kept in mind. How many people will be using your spa? Will you entertain family and friends occasionally or frequently? Choosing a spa to accommodate



two individuals versus six individuals is not as easy as it sounds. Looking from the outside in, most spas seem comfortable and accommodating. To ensure a perfect fit, simply get right in and stretch those legs. In fact, take a "wet test." Sitting in a wet spa feels totally different than sitting in a dry spa because of the buoyancy factor. Besides, testing a spa with water will enable you to determine exactly the right fit for your body. For instance, you'll want to ensure that your spa seats are not too deep or shallow, depending on your torso length.

When you find that perfect spa size, make sure that your favorite

jets are in your favorite seats. If family and friends will use your spa frequently, choose a spa that has a large foot well or else everyone will be playing "footsie" with their toes.

By taking the time to select your perfect spa, you'll enjoy many hours of relaxation for years to come. Now, if you will excuse me, I have a very important date with my husband in my own backyard.

For more information or help in selecting the perfect spa, call Annette M. Stockley, who owns Pool & Patio Center with her husband, Ken. Pool & Patio Center is located at 53 Sandy Bottom Road in Coventry.

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