

Build an Outdoor Canopy Easily

You're planning an outdoor celebration, and you want it to be perfectly unforgettable. But, it's the celebration you want your guests to remember. Not the outdoors.

An outdoor canopy is a great way to provide shade and shelter for those unforgettable weddings, garden celebrations, art shows and festivals. You can also use an outdoor canopy as a simple shady retreat in the backyard on lazy Sunday mornings or blistering hot summer afternoons.

Whatever your reason for having an outdoor canopy, you can easily design and build your own. Imagine your own outdoor canopy, shading your guests from hot sun, or sheltering them from the rain. You can even add a personal touch with unique designs, adding even more life to your backyard BBQs, garden parties and outdoor activities. While a homemade canopy can be a challenge, the excitement and pride are certainly worth the effort.

Here's what you'll need to build an outdoor canopy:

1. Three yards of outdoor fabric
2. Four yards of outdoor fabric for the border
3. Six brass grommets (available at marine stores)
4. One hundred to two hundred feet of laundry rope
5. Tent poles (usually six, depending upon the location of your canopy, and the number of trees)

Follow these steps to build your own unique outdoor canopy:

Outdoor Canopy Fabric

When you're shopping for fabric, it's suggested that you purchase a 108" x 54" piece of natural-colored awning fabric. The fabric should offer protection, while letting the sunlight filter through. Cut the fabric in half diagonally to form two equal triangles. It's possible to create other shapes for the canopy, but make sure that they will overlap in a way that lets you hang the chandelier through the center.

Colorful Border Fabric

Choose a border in a fun pattern or coordinating color. First, cut six 10" wide border strips. Each strip should be cut to the length of one side of the triangle, plus an extra 14" for turning the raw edges under, depending on the size of the triangle cut.

Fold the Strips

Along each long row edge you'll need to fold about 1" toward the center of the strip, then press in place with a hot iron; the strip will now be 8" wide. Fold each strip in half lengthwise with the wrong sides together, making it 4" wide, and then press. Pin these folded strips together, enclosing the edges of the triangles. Turn under the ends and miter the corners (a sewing book can give you mitering instructions). Topstitch through all layers using a sewing machine. Following instructions included with your grommet kit, place a brass grommet in each of the triangles' corners.

Trial and Error

Lay out the best way to hang your outdoor canopy and chandelier, depending on how you want the final outcome. Begin by arranging the pieces on the ground and visualizing how each corner will hang. You can arrange two triangles roughly side-by-side, allowing the corners to overlap a foot or so in the center. The resulting "V" formed in front of this overlap will make a nice hook where you can hang the chandelier. The front points of the two canopy triangles will be balanced from the same tree (or tent pole) with nylon laundry rope. The center back corners will crisscross and be tied to opposite trees or poles. Make sure that one triangle hangs about a foot higher than the other. Additional tent poles are used to hold up the two outside corners.

Hang Your Outdoor Canopy

You'll need at least two people for this step. Try to find three trees, about 15' to 20' apart, positioned in a triangular arrangement. Each tree should have elevated branches, so you can hang your outdoor canopy at about 6', or high enough to allow people to stand beneath it. Hang the outdoor canopy by flipping the rope lines over the tree limbs, and pulling and tying them tightly around the tree trunks. If using a tent pole for support, you'll have to slip the tops of the tent poles through the suitable corner grommets, and then slipknot a length of rope around the top of each tent pole. Pull all of the ropes taut to the ground and attach them to tent stakes, setting the stakes at least two or three feet away from the pole and the trees. You can adjust the outdoor canopy to the height you want by pulling on the ropes.

After everything has been done and set up, you are now ready to decorate your outdoor canopy any way you desire. Add hanging decorations or flowers to it. Create a sparkling effect with strings of white lights, or just let the natural beauty of your creation shine through.

It's easy and fun to build an outdoor canopy. The result is a fun and functional design that you'll be happy to share with your guests.

