

2026

Patio Season Guide for Restaurants

Your playbook for a profitable
outdoor dining season



Patio season is one of the **biggest** revenue opportunities of the year for full service restaurants.

With more diners seeking out outdoor experiences and larger group gatherings on the rise, the operators who prepare early are the ones who finish the season ahead.

More than 81% of full service operators now offer patio or outdoor dining and it's easy to see why. For many restaurants, patio sales represent up to 49% of total sales during peak season.

The difference between a patio that drives revenue and one that just adds complexity usually comes down to preparation. This guide gives you the practical tools, tactics, and insights to get there. And when you're ready to open, the [TouchBistro Patio Season Checklist](#) has you covered.

81%+

of North American operators offer outdoor dining as part of their service

UP TO

49%

of total sales come from the patio for many operators in season

Thinking about adding a patio this season?

You're not alone! While this guide is designed for operators already running a patio, TouchBistro has the resources to help you get your outdoor dining space off the ground.

The insights and data featured throughout this guide are drawn from TouchBistro's 2026 State of Restaurants Reports, conducted in partnership with The Harris Poll surveying 1,200+ full service restaurant operators across the U.S. and Canada, as well as firsthand input from TouchBistro customers.

What You Can Do Now

STAFFING

Staffing a patio properly is more complex than simply adding headcount, and with **over 30% of operators** reporting larger group sizes this past year, getting it right matters more than ever.

Operating a patio typically means more space and more volume, which translates into higher overall labor costs. A labor management solution like [TouchBistro Labor Management](#) helps you forecast staffing needs accurately, protecting your margins before the season even starts. When building your schedule, don't forget to factor in the weather – a sunny weekend can flip your volume overnight.

The top strategies operators use to manage labor costs include increasing productivity and cross-training staff across roles. This can be done by investing in outdoor-specific training – covering weather protocols, longer ticket times, and higher back of house volume – which will pay off quickly when your patio fills up. Cross-training hosts, runners, and servers can also be the difference between a guest who leaves happy and one who doesn't come back.

To alleviate staffing pressures, many operators have turned to QR code menus and tableside payments, freeing staff to focus on delivering an exceptional guest experience, rather than running back and forth.

30%+

of operators reporting larger group sizes this past year

State of Restaurants Survey Respondent

“

We added a patio to our restaurants this past year. It did keep the place busy and we ended up making some profit. But it is difficult to keep all the other costs, such as the number of staff, staff working conditions, and cost of inventories.”

— **Owner**

Bar/Grill, Vancouver, BC

“

Including QR codes on our tables has helped guests easily access our menu and key information during busy periods, especially when servers are in the weeds and can't be as prompt as they'd like to be.”

— **Jeff Houlton**

Tavern Group, Ottawa, ON
(100+ seats)



PHYSICAL SETUP: AESTHETICS AND MAINTENANCE

If you operate a seasonal outdoor dining space, spend time reflecting on your previous patio setup:

- 01 Was the layout efficient for your staff?
- 02 Were you able to maximize sales (4-top tables vs 6-top tables)?
- 03 Does your patio setup plan for all types of weather (i.e. tents, umbrellas, fans)?
- 04 Was there furniture that needed replacing?
- 05 Is there anything worth changing this year, or can it wait until next season (i.e. adding more seating or implementing an outdoor bar)?



Before opening day, **clean and inspect** all patio furniture and equipment – umbrellas, tables, and chairs included. Replace anything that didn't survive storage in good shape.

ADD THE FINISHING TOUCHES

With many diners searching for their next patio experience online, consider adding decor – string lights, candles, or greenery – to make your setup more aesthetically pleasing and “Instagram-worthy.” A well-styled patio is also more likely to end up on a guest's feed – free marketing that money can't buy!



Patio Opening Checklist

A printable, easy-to-use checklist that walks you through everything you need to open your patio, so nothing gets missed.

[Check it out ↓](#)

What's Working on Patios This Season

Hear from real operators across North America on what they're adding, fixing, and rethinking ahead of their patio's opening day.

“

A heated, covered, and enclosed wrap-around porch offers guests the feeling of eating outside all year round. We also have patio dining outside, with a shaded garden side and a sunny side that has adjustable umbrellas. We have options for everyone to make it work well.”

— **Andrea Hamade**
Jack's Gastropub, Kingsville, ON
(20-50 seats)



“

We're elevating our patio with lush greenery, cooling fans, and refreshing outdoor frozen drinks to keep the vibes high and the heat low. It's all about creating a more comfortable, vibrant space to sip, relax, and stay for a while.”

— **Rachel Jacobson**
Back Porch Pizza Bar Mount Dora, FL
(51-100 seats)



“

We're looking to add patio heaters, flowers, window art, and a speaker to play music on the patio.”

— **Dilip Maurya**
Maurya's Restaurant Bar & Banquet
Kamloops, BC (<20 seats)



“

We will be updating our lawn and picnic tables by adding new plants and refreshing our garden beds.”

— **Andorra Wright**
Bramasole, Fernie, B.C (20-50 seats)



“

We're adding special blinds and curtains, more comfortable seats, and ventilation systems to our patio this season.”

— **David Hernandez**
La Taqueria Brentwood
Burnaby, BC (51-100 seats)



“

We utilize our patio space well and welcome all friends, including pets! To enhance our patio this season we are adding more greenery to make the space more inviting and comfortable.”

— **Taylor Napler**
Tommy's, Kingston, ON
(<20 seats)



GUEST EXPERIENCE

A consistently great guest experience is what turns a first patio visit into a regular one.

Hosting watch parties for sporting events, like the [FIFA World Cup](#), or live music events to celebrate holidays like Mother's Day and Labor Day is a great way to create a memorable outdoor dining experience. Events like these don't just fill seats – they drive higher average checks and keep guests coming back.



Of course, patio season also means dealing with pests.

Repelling plants like lavender are a simple, low-cost fix, and tiki torches do double duty – keeping bugs away while adding warmth and ambiance. On cooler evenings, having blankets and heaters on hand goes a long way toward keeping guests comfortable and enjoying their stay.

MENU AND OPERATIONS SETUP

While an aesthetically pleasing patio and a great guest experience are important deciding factors for diners, a well-planned menu is equally critical.

Start by reviewing what worked well in the past – what sold, what didn't, and where there's room to add something new. For inspiration, **think light and refreshing dishes and are easy to execute at volume** – gazpacho, grain bowls, citrus-forward cocktails. Items that photograph well don't hurt either!

For more direction, here's what other operators are planning to implement in the next six months:

AMERICAN OPERATORS

39% are adding more locally sourced ingredients

Followed by adding more vegetarian and more non-alcoholic drink options.

CANADIAN OPERATORS

43% are adding more locally sourced ingredients

Followed by add more vegetarian options and limiting the number of specials.

Whatever you add, make sure the menu works for outdoor service – items that travel well, hold up in the heat, and don't create unnecessary complexity for your kitchen. Consider adding an outdoor bar or bussing station closer to the outdoor dining area to improve flow.

Tell Guests Early with These **Three Simple Plays**

The moment your patio is opening-day ready, the work shifts from setup to getting the word out. Operators who fill seats on day one will have a headstart on making this patio season their most successful one yet.

01

Update Google Business

Update your Google Business profile with patio season hours, photos, and new seating capacity.

02

Send an email or SMS blast

Send an email or SMS blast to your existing guest list announcing your opening date and any early season promotions.

03

Tease on social

Use your social media to give a sneak peek of your space – new decor, menu previews, and upcoming events perform well ahead of the season. When it comes to platforms, Facebook and Instagram are where the majority of operators are active, and where guests are most likely to find you. TikTok is growing fast and worth considering if short-form video fits your brand.



Three Patio Challenges, Three Solutions

O1. Handling Additional Volume

CHALLENGE

More than 80% of operators reported visits increased in the past year, up 30% on average. While that growth is exciting, managing the additional volume is one of the most common operational challenges operators face during patio season.

SOLUTION

- A [Kitchen Display System \(KDS\)](#) improves efficiency between front and back of house, as orders placed through the POS appear right away decreasing ticket times and eliminating errors – all key in handling increased guest volume.
- A [Labor Management System](#) ensures your restaurant is properly staffed at all times, so your team can deliver consistent, efficient service, even on your busiest days.

O2. Streamlining Indoor and Outdoor Flow

CHALLENGE

The distance from outdoor dining tables to the indoor POS station – or simply not having a POS accessible on the patio – is a top challenge operators report.

SOLUTION

A mobile [POS](#) system, like iPads for servers, dramatically improves operations. With tableside ordering, servers can take and input orders on the spot, reducing errors, turning tables faster, and boosting sales without the constant back and forth.

O3. Weather Unpredictability

CHALLENGE

Beautiful weather fills a patio fast, but conditions can shift without warning. Many operators cite unpredictability as one of their biggest seasonal challenges.

SOLUTION

- Make physical updates to your patio like setting up tents, pergolas, or enclosures to keep your outdoor space open regardless of the weather (and season!)
- Rather than holding patio reservations on unpredictable weather days, a digital waitlist lets you capture demand in real-time without the no-show risk of committed bookings.



Florida weather can shift in an instant. Staying adaptable is key.”

— **Rachel Jacobson**
Back Porch Pizza Bar
Mount Dora, FL (51-100 seats)



We equip our patios with server stations in key places to make our operations smoother.”

— **Christian Diaz**
La Taqueria Pinche Taco Shop
Vancouver, BC (20-50 seats)



Drive Spend, Not Just Covers

30 per cent of operators have expanded their patio seating capacity in the past year and the revenue case is clear. Patios account for around 20% of total sales on average, but for many operators that number climbs to 25-49% of total revenue. **Here's a full breakdown on how to optimize your patio's revenue:**

01

A patio-only beverage program

Build a beverage program specifically curated for patio season

02

Patio-specific promos

Run patio-specific promotions, like daily happy hour specials for outdoor diners

03

Let your POS do the upselling

Use your POS to prompt servers on upsell opportunities and special promotions

Revenue strategy looks different depending on your patio size and concept. Smaller patios (fewer than 20 seats) should focus on check average and table turns, while larger or destination patios should manage dwell time proactively – guests staying too long limits walk-in capacity, especially during peak hours and high-traffic events like the FIFA World Cup.

39%

of operators plan to add private events this year – a revenue stream certainly worth considering. Hosting corporate groups, engagement parties, or milestone celebrations during off-peak hours is a strong way to diversify revenue without adding pressure to your busiest shifts.



As a boutique winery, guests tend to stay for longer periods of time, which can make it difficult to accommodate walk-in traffic."

— **Christy Bibby**

Vineyard Kitchen & Patio
Okanagan Falls, BC (51-100 seats)



Guests come for a wedding or a corporate event, and soon realize that we offer more than just beer and become regulars for our dine-in experience."

— **Laska Ryan**

Bellwoods Brewery
Toronto, ON (100+ seats)



The Tools Behind a Profitable Patio Season

The right technology can make or break your patio season. Here's how operators are using TouchBistro to run a smoother, more profitable outdoor dining operation:

Tableside Ordering (Mobile POS)

Eliminate the number one patio pain point operators experience; the distance between your tables and your POS station

- Take orders and process payments directly at the table, anywhere on your patio
- Reduce server trips back inside, speed up service, and keep the experience seamless for guests

Payments

Accept payments tableside so guests never have to wait for the bill

- Faster checkouts mean faster table turns, which is critical during peak patio hours
- Support tipping, bill splitting, and card-present transactions right on the patio

Kitchen Display System (KDS)

Manage the added kitchen volume that comes with a full patio

- Keep indoor and patio tickets organized and visible to your BOH team in real time
- Reduce miscommunication between front and back of house when volume spikes

Reservations

Manage your patio capacity and capture demand on your best weather days

- Use a digital waitlist to capture walk-in traffic in real time without the commitment of holding tables on unpredictable weather days
- 89% of operators who run a patio use a reservation platform – make sure yours is set up to capture every cover opportunity

Floor Plan & Table Management

Manage your indoor and outdoor sections from one view

- Assign patio sections, monitor table status, and adjust seating on the fly as weather or volume changes
- Keep servers and hosts coordinated across a split operation

Labor Management

Staff your patio smarter, not just more

- Build schedules that flex with your patio season so you're not overstaffing on slow days or scrambling on busy ones
- Track labor costs in real time against patio revenue to protect your margins

How Technology Shows Up on Real Patios

Hear from real operators on how having a strong tech stack can support your patio operations.

“

Having the largest patio in town, our restaurant often has a waitlist. With our TouchBistro Reservations software we can easily manage our outdoor and indoor seating, ensuring our staff can accommodate everyone. The tool also helps us block off our back dining room tables to prevent reservations when the patio is open.”

— **Andrea Hamade**

Jack's Gastropub, Kingsville, ON (20-50 seats)



“

The large size of our patios creates challenges with efficiency and service levels, so having the mobile POS terminals (iPads) available to take tableside orders makes a huge difference with guest service and average guest check size.”

— **Vance Bosch**

Central Social Hall
Edmonton, AB (100+ seats)



“

Technology like our TouchBistro POS system helps streamline how orders are taken and sent to the kitchen, making the whole process more efficient. It also allows us to serve guests faster.”

— **David Hernandez**

La Taqueria Brentwood
Burnaby, BC (51-100 seats)



“

The biggest challenge is how quickly things can shift, especially with Ontario weather. Technology helps us stay flexible, whether that's adjusting layouts on the fly or managing sudden rushes when the sun comes out. It allows us to do what we do best, which is take care of our guests even with long lines and high volume.

— **Laska Ryan**

Bellwoods Brewery, Toronto, ON (100+ seats)



End of Season

More than 80% of operators who have a patio are optimistic about the future of their business and a well-run patio season is a big reason why. The operators who finish strong are the ones who planned ahead, adapted in real time, and took the time to learn from the season when it was over.

To set yourself up for an even stronger year ahead, conduct an end-of-season review with your team. Have an honest debrief – what worked, what didn't, and what you'd do differently.

END-OF-SEASON DEBRIEF · PROMPTS

Six questions to ask your team

- 01 What was your revenue per cover?**

- 02 What was your restaurant's split between patio and indoor dining?**

- 03 Were there top-selling food or drink item(s) worth bringing back next season?**

- 04 Were you short staffed? Would hiring seasonal employees help next year?**

- 05 What feedback did guests share about your patio setup?**

- 06 Are there any technology gaps that created friction this season – like not having a mobile POS on the patio?**

If your restaurant operates a patio year-round, regular pulse checks throughout the season can still be valuable – giving you and your staff the chance to make adjustments to your menu, setup, or tech stack before small issues become bigger ones.

A NOTE ON OUR DATA

The data referenced throughout this guide was sourced from TouchBistro's 2026 State of Restaurants Reports, where we partnered with research firm The Harris Poll to survey more than 1,200 full-service restaurant owners, presidents, and area and general managers across the U.S. and Canada. Research was conducted from October 2 to October 25, 2025. Additional insights were gathered from TouchBistro customers and operators via direct survey in April 2026.

The TouchBistro Patio Season Checklist

01 Staffing

- Patio staffing structure finalized, including roles and section assignments
- Schedules built with flexibility based on weather and expected volume
- Staff trained on outdoor service – ticket times, weather protocols, and additional volume
- Labor management tool configured to track patio labor costs separately

02 Menu & Operations

- Patio menu reviewed and streamlined for outdoor service efficiency
- Reservation and waitlist system tested and ready
- Patio opening communicated to guests via Google Business, email, and social platforms
- Outdoor bar or bussing station set up to support patio flow

03 Physical Setup

- Patio furniture pulled from storage, cleaned, and inspected
- Umbrellas, heaters, and fans tested and operational
- Weather contingency plan in place – tents, enclosures, or indoor overflow capacity confirmed
- Lighting, decor, and any seasonal touches installed

04 Guest Experience

- Pest control measures in place – repelling plants, citronella, tiki torches
- Blankets and/or heaters available for cooler evenings
- Live music, events, or FIFA World Cup screening schedule confirmed
- Private event offerings communicated and bookable

05 Technology

- Mobile POS devices charged, tested, and assigned to patio staff
- Tableside payment terminals tested on the patio
- Kitchen Display System updated to reflect patio sections
- Floor plan updated in the POS to reflect patio layout and sections
- Reservation and waitlist platform live and accepting bookings
- Staff schedule updated and published for opening weeks

