

# Planning an outdoor movie night



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



# How to reach us

## EMAIL AND PHONE

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## NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

## ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

## GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated November 2025.

# What is an outdoor movie night?

An outdoor movie night is a fun, outdoor event that neighbourhoods can plan during warmer seasons of the year. They are an opportunity for neighbours to come together to socialize and enjoy the nice weather while watching a movie on a big outdoor screen.

Outdoor movie nights are:

- Tailored to a specific neighbourhood (not city-wide)
- Neighbourhood-led and organized
- Inclusive and welcoming for all neighbours
- Provide neighbours with a fun evening in their community
- Hosted in a space that is accessible to all attendees

This guide outlines the steps you can take to plan an outdoor movie night for your neighbourhood. If you have specific questions about your outdoor movie night, reach out to the [neighbourhoods team](#) for support!

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For guidance planning other types of neighbourhood events, refer to the [Planning a Neighbourhood Event](#) guide.



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## Step 1: Connect with neighbours

Start by connecting with neighbours to get a sense of who would like to attend an outdoor movie night. Having an idea of how many people will come to the event will help you know how much support and equipment you may need.

When connecting with neighbours, see if anyone is interested in helping plan and deliver the event. The more people involved in helping with the event, the easier it will be. Consider asking questions to help you plan the event:

- What date would work best?
- What kind of movie would you be interested in watching?
- Are you interested in volunteering to help with the movie night?

## Step 2: Brainstorm important details

You and your team of neighbours should begin planning for the outdoor movie night as early as possible. When planning, think about some of these important details with your team:

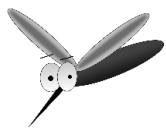
- Where will the movie be held?
- Should there be food available?
- What do I need to host this event? (i.e., hydro, open space)

- What is our budget? Do we need additional financial support?

## DATE OF THE MOVIE NIGHT

There are many factors that go into selecting a date for your event. Outdoor movies should be hosted during seasons where neighbours will be comfortable outdoors and the equipment will work at average temperatures (May to October). The event needs to take place after sunset, so everyone can see the screen clearly.

Because sunset is often later in peak of summer months, the outdoor movie will start later in the evening. Later start times may not work well for families with younger children, so consider this in your planning. It also may be more disruptive for surrounding neighbours.



Insects can impact outdoor events. Remind neighbours to bring insect repellent!

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When connecting with neighbours, consider sending out a survey with several dates to see when works best for the majority of people. It is recommended that you also select an alternative day in case of rainy or windy weather. Clearly communicate how you will update neighbours leading up to the event for cancellations or rescheduled dates.

It a good idea to plan an event at least 3 months in advance. This gives you time to make sure the event is well planned, and it also gives neighbours enough notice to make plans to attend.

## PICKING A LOCATION FOR THE MOVIE NIGHT

Outdoor movie nights have requirements that impact where you can host your event. While park spaces are ideal, not all parks have electricity available. Consider talking to neighbours to find a setup that meets your event needs, such as choosing a park that borders a neighbour's backyard that would allow you to use their hydro.

When selecting a location for your movie night, consider the following:

- Is the location close to the neighbourhood and easily accessible?
- Does the space have access to electricity? Or is a nearby neighbour willing to let you use their hydro?
- Is the location large enough for all neighbours to comfortably attend and enjoy?
- Is there a suitable space to place the large screen on flat ground?

Check out our [gathering spaces map](#) to explore parks. When you're ready to book, don't forget to include a rain date! You can also purchase insurance throughout the booking process for a park space. If you're new to this process, reach out to the [neighbourhoods team](#) for support!

In addition to park spaces, you may get permission to host an outdoor movie night on private property. When hosting an event on private property, make sure you have written

permission, required insurance, and that the event is open and accessible for all neighbours that want to attend.

If you are interested in hosting the movie night indoors, consider larger spaces. Gymnasiums are a great option especially if you would like to host a movie night in colder weather.

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Did you know that you need a movie license to host an outdoor movie night? For more information about this requirement, check out Step 4.



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## Step 3: Connect with the neighbourhoods team

The neighbourhoods team is here to help you coordinate events to make sure everything runs smoothly and you aren't missing any important details. Connect with the team if you have questions about outdoor movie planning, such as park permits, movie licenses, and insurance (if applicable). Connect early to ensure permits and approvals for hosting events in park spaces are included in your planning.



There is funding available to support neighbourhood events! Connect with the neighbourhoods team to learn more about how to apply for neighbourhood grants.

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## Step 4: Organize event details

Once you have your location, date, and time established and have connected with the neighbourhoods team, you can officially move to the next stages of planning the event.

### FOOD AND DRINKS

Food and drinks add extra fun to movie nights and there are plenty of ways to enjoy tasty snacks. Consider whether you want to encourage neighbours to bring their own food, or if you would like to have food served to the attendees. Some options include:

- Purchase pre-packaged event snacks that volunteers will hand out to attendees, like freezies, popcorn, or chips.
- Organize a BBQ by purchasing needed supplies and having volunteers grill pre-cooked items.
- Host a potluck to encourage neighbours to share snacks! Make sure to ask each neighbour to bring an ingredient list for dietary and allergy needs.

- Book a licensed food truck to attend the event. There are local dessert trucks and plenty of different cuisines!
- Hire a local business to cater the event with a set menu. Finger foods or other easy to eat snacks can work well outdoors.
- Organize a cotton candy or popcorn machine run by volunteers to prepare and serve these tasty treats at the event. Event or party companies often have machine rentals available. If you'd like to learn more about this, contact the [neighbourhoods team](#) for our list of recommended businesses.

It is important to think about health and safety guidelines when serving food. Consider dietary restrictions and allergies when planning to purchase food. Any food brought in to share with neighbours should include a list of ingredients so neighbours know what they will be eating. Any items that may cause dietary concerns (such as dairy, meat, soy, gluten, nuts, etc.) should be clearly communicated and noted for all attendees.

To make your event more sustainable, make sure all neighbours sort their waste in the appropriate garbage, recycling, and compost bins. You can contact the [parks team](#) to request large recycle and garbage bins for your event or ask neighbours to borrow their household containers to put recycle and compost out with their regular household collection.



## OUTDOOR MOVIE EQUIPMENT

To run your outdoor movie night, you have two options:

- Hire a company to run the event for you (ask about our list of companies!)
- If you select this option, we recommend getting quotes and availability from more than one company.
- Any vehicles accessing a City of Waterloo park require a [Park Access Permit](#) prior to entering the space. Neighbourhood-led events are free of charge. The form must be submitted at least 30 days in advance. The company accessing the park must also provide a copy of their insurance naming the City of Waterloo as an additional insured.
- Ask the company what the booking includes. Some important questions to consider are: Will they provide the selected movie and movie licence? What is the policy for poor weather conditions? Do they require hydro?
- Borrow equipment from the city to operate your own neighbourhood movie night
- Contact the [neighbourhoods team](#) to review the event equipment list. Outdoor movie essentials including a large screen, projector, speakers, and extension cords and covers are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. These items are available for free for neighbourhood events.
- Once you know what you'd like to borrow, work with the City to coordinate pickup and drop off times at our storage location. Plan extra time before the event to test out the equipment. Every computer is different, so it's good to familiarize yourself with

needed settings and adjustments in advance. Have a tech savvy neighbour on hand throughout the event!

- You can also rent equipment through the [parks team](#), such as tables, fencing, garbage cans and recycling bins.

## SELECTING A MOVIE

When picking a movie for your event, think about who will be in attendance. Movies should be appropriate for the people attending and should not display any offensive, violent, cruel, or crude elements. For example, neighbourhood-wide movie nights should be appropriate for people of all ages and a teen movie night may have a film aimed at young adults.

If you are using neighbourhood equipment to run the outdoor movie, you will need to take additional steps to plan for movie licencing. If you are using an outdoor movie company that covers the movie license, skip to step 5.

## MOVIE LICENSE AND FILM ACCESS

When hosting an outdoor movie, you will require an outdoor movie license and must show a legal version of the film. This is required, so proper funding and copyright steps occur for use of the movie. Connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#) to learn more about getting a movie license and financial support options.



[Audio Cine Films Inc.](#) and [Criterion Pictures](#) are companies available for obtaining a movie license. You can search available titles on each website or explore popular suggestions.

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You will need to obtain a copy of the film you plan to show, such as through a paid streaming service, digital download, Blu-Ray or DVD. Try out the movie on the laptop or tablet you plan to use on event day.

# Step 5: Promote your event and start communicating with neighbours

Consider recruiting a team of interested neighbours to help promote your event. Whether it is to design posters, share flyers across the neighbourhood, or post on social media, having a team to help shares the workload.

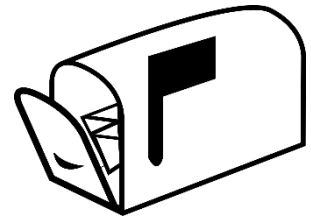
Important details should be shared when promoting your event, such as the date, time, location, and anything neighbours should bring to the event (for example lawn chairs, blankets, reusable water bottles, food).

## WAYS TO PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

- Print posters and hang them in common areas of your neighbourhood
- Spread the word on different social media platforms
- Translate invitations and other promotions into different languages or let neighbours know who to contact for this option
- Post details about the event on community message boards or places like WhatsApp and NextDoor

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For neighbours surrounding the outdoor movie location, leave a letter in their mailbox or visit their door a week or two in advance to let them know. This helps them prepare for the event and the sound that outdoor movies involve, such as coordinating bedtimes for young family members or planning for increased parking on the street. Be sure to encourage them to join the fun!



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## Step 6: Planning event set up

It is important that you have enough support to run the event, so consider recruiting a team of neighbours to help set up and clean up the space. Once you have a team of neighbours together, prepare a to-do list to help guide the set up work.

Here are some helpful tips to think about when getting ready for setting up your event:

- If you are renting equipment or bringing it yourself, charge all devices and equipment during the day of or the night before. Bring any needed chargers to the event. Consider testing the equipment beforehand to make sure everyone involved is comfortable with the set up.
- Have a volunteer send a reminder leading up to the event, outlining assigned tasks and when volunteers should arrive. If anyone has volunteered for special tasks, like picking up a popcorn machine or purchasing snacks, make sure everyone has communicated the details for this such as payment, timing, and quantities.
- Create a diagram to highlight how the space will be set up. This will help volunteers have an understanding of the vision for the event. Note where you would like the movie screen and speakers to be located, as well as any food and drink tables. Make sure you have enough space for neighbours to spread out and see the screen.
- Delegate set up tasks to volunteers in advance so everyone has a clear role.
- Ensure all volunteers and organizers know what to do in the case of an emergency, such as assigning an exit to each volunteer, or having a designated person for announcements.
- Make sure event equipment is set up in a way that allows emergency vehicles to access the event space.

- Encourage all neighbours to bring chairs or blankets to sit on to watch the film. Other important things to remind neighbours to bring include: a reusable water bottle, insect repellent, comfy clothes, and friends!
- Make sure your event space is accessible. Check with neighbours to see if there are any accessibility needs prior to your event, such as including closed captions during screening.



Encourage neighbours to walk or bike to the event. Make sure bike lights are charged for the ride home!

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## MOVIE SET UP

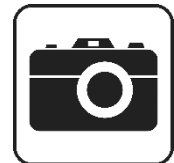
If you have decided to rent outdoor movie equipment from the City, it is recommended that at least two people are involved in the set up. If you have any questions or concerns about setting up for the movie, reach out to the [neighbourhoods team](#).

## Step 7: Movie time!

The planning and set-up is complete – now it is time to celebrate with your neighbours! To ensure the movie runs smoothly, make sure you have a team of neighbours to monitor the event, help with any planned snacks or activities, and greet and direct attendees to the movie space.

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Don't forget to take pictures and videos of your event to share. Make sure your guests know that photos and videos are being taken, and respect anyone's wishes to not be included. Reach out to the [neighbourhoods team](#) for a sample event photography poster.



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## Step 8: Clean up

Now that your event has ended, it is time to arrange for clean up.

A team of neighbours should be recruited during event planning to help with the clean up after the event. If the event is in a public space, like a park, make sure to follow the booking guidelines and clean the space promptly after the event.

Clean, dry, and/or package all event equipment properly prior to returning to the neighbourhoods team or the neighbour you have borrowed an item from.

Make sure to return all items on time and to its correct storage location. These details will be arranged with the neighbourhoods team in advance.

# Resources

For more information about organizing neighbourhood events, checking out our [Planning a Neighbourhood Event guide](#).

## NEIGHBOURHOOD MOVIE NIGHT CHECKLIST

This checklist is here to help you stay on track while planning your movie night. You don't need to complete every item unless they are required. If you have questions or want support, connect with the [neighbourhoods team](#):

- Book your event space. Using a city park? Use the [Gathering Space Map](#) to find parks near you and request a booking.
- Explore a movie license. This is required either through your movie provider or with support from the neighbourhoods team.
- Obtain the movie. Get a physical version of the movie or a digital copy. Check out streaming services as they may have the movie available.
- Outdoor movies require a noise exemption, apply for a [Noise Exemption Permit 30 days in advance](#).
- Having a vehicle enter the park space (i.e., a food truck or movie trailer)? Apply for [Park Access Permit 30 days in advance](#).
- Using neighbourhood event equipment from the city? Reach out to the neighbourhoods team to request a booking.
- Serving food at the event? Be sure to meet [public health requirements](#)
- Do you have neighbours nearby the movie night? Leave a letter in their mailbox or visit their door a week or two in advance to let them know about the movie night. This will help them prepare for the loud noises and increased parking