Best Buy Awards
Top hot tubs for 2012

Hot products
Latest outdoor gadget news

Spa masterclass
Top tips for spa buyers

Garden ideas
In-spa-rational designs to create the 'wow' factor

Stars in their Spas
Celebrities in hot water
When you purchase a hot tub you are not just buying a product to enhance your garden, it will be also the start of a whole new spa-kling lifestyle that will transform your health and well-being forever.

In recent years the popularity of hot tubs has soared as more and more people are now getting the opportunity to try them out for themselves, and get a taste of all the benefits, while enjoying a post-gym soak, or during a weekend spa break or even at a holiday lodge park, cottage or chalet. The vast majority of these people then become hooked once they experience the joy of immersing themselves in the calming and enveloping delights of hot water, bringing their tired muscles back to life with the massaging jets.

Buying your own hot tub is a decision that appeals to both head and heart. As a way of enhancing your outdoor lifestyle the addition of a garden spa is unparalleled. Even the stress-busting alternatives for your hard-earned cash, such as a ‘relaxing vacation’ no longer make sound financial sense as the prices of overseas holidays for the average family are now outstripping the price of buying a quality hot tub that will bring a lifetime of enjoyment.

Healthy investment

With our busy modern lifestyles it’s all too easy to get stressed-out by manic workloads, domestic chores, and what feels like constant doom and gloom over the airwaves, particularly during the last 12 months. What leisure time we have left has become ever more precious.

As a result of our modern busy lifestyles it is all too easy to become physically, mentally and emotionally rundown. This can have a detrimental effect on your general health and well-being.

Occasional visits to health spas for massages are often viewed as a treat rather than part of a regular health regime, and so they don’t address the issue of healthy living on a day-to-day basis. Which is where hot tubs come in.

Having a hot tub installed in your home offers you a healthy pick-me-up whenever you feel like it; before you head off to work, after a heavy gym session or jog, or just as a relaxing preamble to a great night’s sleep.

The massaging action of the jets and warmth of the water not only feel fantastic; they also do important maintenance work to keep you feeling physically and mentally fit and healthy.

On a more general level, what could be better after a hard day at the office than relaxing with friends, family or simply on your own and letting the cares of the day drift away in a bubbling tub? Having some ‘tub time’ also enables you to reconnect with your loved ones and have a proper catch-up without any distractions.

Hydrotherapy advantage

Although it is a term we regularly hear about, for many of us the curative effects of water in the form of hydrotherapy are now only being fully understood. Modern day hydrotherapy treatments are used to counteract a whole host of illnesses and ailments, as well as helping to eliminate toxins from the body that are a cause of inflammation and joint pain.

Healing elements of hydrotherapy are based on both mechanical and/or thermal effects: the body’s reaction to hot and cold stimuli, the ‘massaging’ pressure exerted by the water and the sensation of the water itself. This combination stimulates the touch receptors on the skin, which reaches deeper down to kick-start our immune system’s production of healing white blood cells and stress-busting endorphins – the vital pain-killing chemicals our bodies naturally produce.

As part of the process, the corresponding increase in blood circulation helps to relieve tight and overworked muscles and lower blood pressure, which is why those who use a hot tub on a regular basis will feel relaxed and calm.

Once our bodies are submerged in water, such as a hot tub, we experience a kind of weightlessness, without the effects of gravity. The resulting buoyancy in turn lifts your limbs and reduces the workload by up to 20 per cent that is usually exerted on your heart.

It is well documented that hot water helps to relax muscles, which makes hydrotherapy an effective form of treatment for poor circulation, arthritis, rheumatism, as well as generally sore muscles after a particularly heavy workout. Another benefit is that it raises body temperature, causing the body to perspire, naturally eliminating it of toxins via your pores.

SPA-KLING LIFESTYLE

Invest in your own hot tub and discover a new healthy and happy lifestyle
Mood enhancers

Coloured lighting in a hot tub can be particularly attractive at night but it can also help to stimulate the senses and have a dramatic effect on mood and wellness. Most models are now equipped with different coloured underwater lights and the soothing powers of Chromotherapy are another benefit of regular use of a hot tub.

Chemotherapy, or colour therapy is an alternative form of healing based on the principal that the seven shades of the spectrum are infused with healing energies, which can be used to balance a person’s energy. This form of healing, which originates from ayurvedic medicine, assigns different healing properties to each colour. Green, for example, is associated with calm and balance, while red is a colour that is linked to the stimulation of our circulation.

Another way to stimulate your senses with your hot tub is with the use of aromatherapy. It is a firm favourite with spa-goers as the combination of flowing strokes and heady essential oils can produce a truly sensual and relaxing experience. We generally tend to associate aromatherapy with hand-on massages at a spa, but the use of essential oils and other plant extracts to enhance wellness and heighten mood has now become an integral part of hot tub culture. An array of ‘spa soaks’ are now on the market, which can be included in your hot tub regime to not only ensure your spa smells lovely but also help promote the desired mood you require. Peppermint and rosemary will stimulate and invigorate. Then if and when you require a calm feeling you can include lavender oil, which also helps to naturally promote healthy sleep.

Natural sleep cure

If you suffer from the anguish and torment of restless nights and sleep deprivation there can be no greater cure than to find a regular natural source of quality sleep, which can be discovered in the regular use of your hot tub.

According to recent research by the Mental Health Foundation, almost two thirds of us struggle to get a good night’s rest. The problem has become so bad, experts say it constitutes a major public health concern and now, due to media coverage about the use of sleeping tablets, sufferers are looking for a natural cure rather than resorting to over the counter remedies from pharmacists.

Of those questioned, around 60 per cent of adults admit they have a sleep problem and rarely get the recommended six or seven hours a night. Yet regular sessions in a hot tub could be the simplest and most natural cure. Just 15 per cent of us sleep well, according to the 2011 survey of 5,300 people by the Mental Health Foundation. The Mental Health Foundation has called for deep sleep campaigns to make the public more aware of the importance of getting a good night’s rest. When we are sleep deprived it has been found that our levels of uric acid, a waste product in the blood that results from the body breaking down foods and is associated with diabetes and gout, goes up. Scientists at the American Heart Association have discovered that when we sleep fewer than six hours a night, the levels of inflammatory substances in our blood can jump by a quarter.

The long-term worry is that inflammation can be lethal. Chronically high levels harden our arteries and damage our hearts, as well as our immune systems.

Experts have also realized that your appetite hormones get knocked out of kilter by tiredness, wakeful nights and poor quality sleep. One study found that cutting sleep down to just four hours increased people’s levels of ghrelin, a hormone that increases appetite, by 28 per cent after only two days.

At the same time, their levels of leptin, a hormone that tells the brain that the stomach is full, dropped by 18 per cent. Meanwhile, a Australian study that followed 20,000 people for a year found those who sleep fewer than seven hours each night are three times more likely than normal sleepers to become psychologically distressed. They are more at risk of bipolar disorder, anxiety and panic disorder. Even a single night without sleep can deeply affect our functioning. Brain scans have shown that after a sleepless night, the centre of emotion in the brain - the amygdala - over-reacts when people are shown disturbing news pictures.

Dr Andrew McCulloch, of the Mental Health Foundation, says: “While great emphasis is rightly placed on the importance of diet and exercise, sleep has far too long been neglected as a major influence on the physical and mental health of the nation. It is crucial we treat the issue of sleep problems as the major public health concern it is.”

If you suffer from sleep problems then just by soaking in a hot tub prior to bedtime will help you unwind and fall into a deeper, more relaxed sleep.

Healing hot tubs

A good soak can do wonders for your health and can be used to both prevent and address a range of issues:

Stress

Stress is known to cause headaches, fatigue and tens, knotted muscles. The combination of heat, massage and buoyancy in a hot tub can relieve tension and stress, ease pressure on the joints and stimulate natural endorphin production.

Inflammation

Soaking in a hot tub prior to bedtime will help you fall into a deeper, more relaxed sleep. Sleep deprivation can lead to depression, poor concentration, mood swings and memory lapses.

Joint pain

Top physios say a soak aids recovery from post-match aches and more serious muscle and joint injuries. Top sportspersons and women have installed hot tubs to keep themselves in peak mental and physical condition, and to speed-up rehabilitation.

Muscle aches and injuries

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is still a lot of confusion in the market, and because many people are first-time buyers, we want to remove that confusion and put all the necessary and relevant information about buying a spa at your fingertips.”

Advice and reviews you can rely on
A key tenet for WhatSpa? is its independence, which ensures you receive informed and impartial advice. You can be safe in the knowledge that you are receiving unbiased, clear and comprehensive information that will enable you to make the right choice when it comes to selecting your ideal spa.

WhatSpa? has a team of respected experts – with a wealth of combined experience in the industry – who are on-hand to provide sound, independent advice and reviews of all the very best spas and hot tubs. We also have a team of ‘Spa Doctors’ who are happy to answer any technical questions and queries that our readers may have.

Best Buy Awards
Since their launch in 2006, WhatSpa? Best Buy Awards have become the industry standard recognition for hot tub models that achieve the best scores in our rigorous tests for quality and value across all price brackets. Our Best Buy Awards cannot be purchased or influenced by third parties such as manufacturers and retailers and we take great pride in their independence, which is why they are now held in such high esteem by both buyers and manufacturers,” reveals Nick.

For a full breakdown of our 2012 Best Buy award winners across all price brackets, go to page 88 and don’t forget to look out for these prestigious logos in showrooms as you start shopping.

Seal of approval
When making any purchase of this size and value, trusting the manufacturer and retailer is essential. WhatSpa? have recognised this and devised our WhatSpa? Approved scheme. This unique hallmark of quality is only awarded to manufacturers and retailers who meet our exacting high standards.

The Approval Scheme offers the customer peace of mind that comes from knowing companies are reputable, well established, have a professional infrastructure and a good track record within the industry, so it is the logo to look out for.

In order to win coveted WhatSpa? Approved status hot tub retailers must have a minimum number of display spas and prove that they have all of the insurance requirements and trained staff in both water safety and technical backup.

WhatSpa? has also teamed up with regulatory bodies, BISHTA (British & Irish Spa & Hot Tub Association) to ensure the highest standards of spa safety. BISHTA is an industry body set up to educate and protect the public against the potential hazards arising from poorly-maintained spas, and to promote the importance of water maintenance. The role fulfilled by BISHTA is vital, and one of our criteria for WhatSpa? approval is BISHTA membership or proof of attendance on a BISHTA recognised pool and spa water hygiene course.

WhatSpa? online
The WhatSpa? website – www.whatspa.com – is the perfect complement to WhatSpa? magazine, providing the ultimate online advice centre for spa and hot tub owners and buyers in the UK. We are completely redesigning the website for 2012, making it more user-friendly and easier to navigate than ever before. The site has fresher graphics and even more information about buying, installing and maintaining your hot tub.

WhatSpa? remains committed to supporting bona fide and professional retailers in the UK, and we have a strict entry policy to our Find a Retailer section, which means you can be confident that when you download the list of your local retailers you know in advance what they have to offer.

You can also save lots of time by using our site to request brochures from our list of major manufacturers and retailers who meet our exacting standards of quality. When our readers keep asking us for a facility to display the current special in-store offers that they can take advantage of, we have listened.

Hot Tub Chooser
The website also links through to Hot Tub Chooser, the UK’s No 1 hot tub search engine. Hot Tub Chooser takes product search to the next level in a way that no general search engine or comparison site can even begin to match. It is the only website that catalogues every major brand and hot tub model in the UK with its definitive database of hot tubs, spas, manufacturers and retailers. You’ll find a simple interactive search tool that gives you a quick list of all the spas available in a local area, with all the relevant information about buying a spa at your fingertips.

To search the hot tub models and savings vouchers available in your local area visit: www.hottubchooser.co.uk
If, like most of us, you’ve never bought a hot tub before, the process can be a little daunting. Fear not, our teams of experts are at hand to walk you through the process and make choosing your new spa as easy as possible. We have broken down our buying tips into three easy steps, each of which will become milestones in your route to choosing the perfect spa to suit your needs.

**Step 1 – Do your homework**

Congratulations! You have already started doing your homework by the very fact that you have purchased this issue of *WhatSpa?* magazine. Welcome to the discerning spa buyers’ club!

Take some time to research which brands are currently available in your local area before you go any further. If you have already visited our website at [www.whatspa.com](http://www.whatspa.com) why not visit our hot tub comparison website [www.hottubchooser.co.uk](http://www.hottubchooser.co.uk), which catalogues every major hot tub brand and model available in the UK into a huge database for you to conveniently search at a time that suits you.

We thoroughly recommend that you purchase your hot tub via a specialist local retailer rather than taking your chances buying over the Internet or on online auction sites. We have seen an endless onslaught of horror stories from unsuspecting UK spa buyers that have taken the risk of buying online from websites that claim comparable quality to established brands at rock bottom prices. Most of these products are grey import copies of established brands from factories in developing countries with few quality controls. See our investigative feature Web danger on page 42 for more in-depth analysis of this worrying trend.

Local specialist retailers, by contrast, have to put their own name and bricks and mortar reputation behind the brands and products that they sell. It is in their vested interests to offer good quality, reliable hot tubs that stand the test of time and delight their clientele. They will service a manageable geographical area so they can respond quickly and cost-effectively to service call-outs, both within your warranty period and thereafter. After your hot tub is installed your retailer will be a local source of spa water care products and will be on hand to offer invaluable tips and advice every time you pop in.

Once you have read our Spa masterclass on page 26 it is time to dip your toe in the water and start visiting your local specialist showrooms to see for yourself what they have to offer. Check out our Retailer Directory on page 122 and visit the Find a Retailer area on our website [www.whatspa.com](http://www.whatspa.com) to get an up to date list of companies in your area. Always look for the WhatSpa? Approved logo and other recognized credentials like BISHTA (British & Irish Spa & Hot Tub Association) membership.

After you have pored over our Spa masterclass, start visiting showrooms armed with your newly found hot tub expertise. Talk to sales staff and get a feel for the models and features on offer in each different price bracket. If you see a model that you like the look of, arrange a ‘wet test’ also known as a ‘test soak’. A wet test is an actual trial of the hot tub in the showroom when you take your bathing costumes along and ‘try before you buy’. All professional retailers will have private wet test facilities and changing rooms. The objective is to pick at least three or four of your favourite models to shortlist for a wet test...the most vital stage in the buying process.

If you can, try to arrange those all important wet tests one after the other on the same day so that the experience of the previous spas is still fresh in your mind when trying those afterwards. Instinct, if possible, on trying the actual models that you are most interested in rather than other models in the range...they all feel different! Allow at least two hours in each showroom to give you adequate time to try as many spas as possible. Then...
How comfortable are the seats? Are the jets providing good quality massage and how adjustable are they for both power and massage type? Is the depth of the spa suitable for your needs given the height and build of the main bather? Remember that you will want a variety of different seating depths so that bathers can swap to a shallower or deeper seat if they feel too hot or too cold respectively. Are the seats too large or too small and are they supporting you comfortably. Ensure that you do not float out of any of the seats, particularly the lounge seats if the spa model has them. If the showroom has the facility to turn the lights down or off, get them to do so as this will enable you to assess the lighting system of the spa. If the model is equipped with audiovisual kit, ask to hear the stereo system and demo the TV/DVD. Take along your favourite CD and iPod so that you can compare the same track in different stereo systems.

Remember that the wet test is all about feel and comfort. Which spa felt best when you tried them? After all, this is the main reason why you are buying one (besides turning the neighbours green with envy!). When you have tried all of the spas on your wet test list and chosen a preferred model and supplier it is the big one... decision time! Before you throw open your cheque book or melt the plastic here are some top tips to getting a great deal.

**Step 2 – Get wet testing**

The best way to conduct a wet test is to get the showroom staff to show you how everything works whilst you are in the spa. They know all the nuances of their spa better than you do. This is not time to be bashful, once you are comfortably in the water, call the showroom staff over to demonstrate the features and controls. Once they have thoroughly demonstrated all the functionality of the spa, get them to leave you to it so you can play around with all of the jets and controls to your heart’s content. Try as many spas as you can in each showroom, you may be surprised to find that the spa that you expected to like best is not the one that you prefer after wet testing.

Bear in mind that when you wet test, there will probably be fewer people in the spa than the maximum spa capacity. How would it feel if you were the only one in? You may be surprised to find that the spa that you were dreading to sit in will probably be calmer than the spa that you were hoping to try. This is important for understanding how a spa will feel once you are in it yourself.

**Step 3 – Close the deal**

Don’t leave your purchase until the last minute. Remember that many of the most well-established manufacturers are in North America and Canada so hot tubs can take up to eight weeks to arrive if the exact model, specification or colour that you have set your heart on is not in stock in the UK. Start shopping at least a couple of months before you want delivery so that you don’t narrow your options to stock spa.

You will be typically required to pay a 25-30 per cent deposit when you place your order and the remaining balance is usually payable either on or a few days before delivery. It is crucial that you always pay any up-front costs (at least £100) by credit card as this affords you the protection of your credit card supplier in anything goes wrong between the point of order and delivery day. Some retailers may charge a levy for credit card payment (up to two per cent is average), we still recommend that you take this option for the protection that it offers.

For extra peace of mind look for Approved retailers and other industry affiliations such as BISHTA (British & Irish Spa & Hot Tub Association) membership. If a retailer is going to the trouble of meeting the requirements to comply with these standards this is a good sign that they are professional retailers and intend to stick around in the future.

**Getting the right deal**

The best deal will not come your way without some hard bargaining so here are some of our top tips to getting the right deal once you have decided on your spa model.

The best deal will be a combination of paying the best price available and also negotiating free or discounted extras wherever possible. Before you commit to the sale think about the additional accessories that are essential to creating a practical spa environment such as steps, cover lifter, delivery, installation and commissioning, spare filters, extra supplies of chemicals etc. These are all bargaining points when negotiating the deal. Try to get as many of them included in the deal as possible. If they are not included you will probably end up buying them at a later date and paying full RRP so now is the best time to get a package deal.

Good retailers may already include such extras at their own cost. Bear this in mind before trying to beat them down even further on price. It is important that they stay in business to serve you and your warranty! On the subject of warranties, ask for a written copy of the warranty certificate before you buy and make sure that you read the small print. Some suppliers may offer extended warranties at a premium so again use this as a bargaining point before you commit to buy. Make sure that the spa warranty covers both parts and labour and ask the retailer if warranty calls are completely free or if you will have to pay a call-out charge.

Professional spa dealerships will also offer service packages to ensure that your spa stays in top tip condition. Again this is often an extra that you will pay for later so now is a great time to get some free servicing thrown in for free.

**Payment options**

If you are paying by cash, cheque or debit card this is cheaper than low rate or interest free finance, which they will probably have to subsidise despite historically low Bank of England base rates.

Credit card transactions typically cost the dealer around two per cent of the balance in fees, so if you are paying by other means you are in a good position to negotiate. Interest free credit can cost the dealer between five and ten per cent of the balance so again, if you have cash on the hip this is a great bargaining chip. We would always recommend paying at least £100 of the deposit or balance by credit card for the extra protection that this offers.

Often the best deals are to be had on ex-display models and previous year models. Retailers will have to move their showroom floor spas on at least once a year typically between Christmas and April (to make way for newer models). The warranty should still start from when you take delivery (confirm this before you buy!) and ex-display spas are often still like new by the time that you take delivery. Expect to pay at least 10-15 per cent less than new model prices for ex-display models that are under 12 months old.

**Check the small print**

Once you have provisionally secured the deal that you want, ask for a complimentary bottle of bubbly and a rubber duck thrown in for good measure and get your spa on order. Always read the contract terms on order forms before you sign and ensure that you will get delivery in a timeframe that you are happy with.

Professional retailers should issue you with a pre-delivery guide, which includes things like base preparation and electrical requirements, and they should also arrange a mutually convenient time for a site visit so they can survey your garden terrain for obstacles and plan your delivery.

All you need to do now is get your electrics and base arranged, put the bubbly on ice and count off the hours to delivery day. Good luck and happy hot bubbling!
Don’t be daunted by the prospect of buying your hot tub. We cut through the jargon for everything you should know before you go spa shopping.

Spa Masterclass

If you’ve read our Spa buyer’s guide, before you head off shopping with your bathing costumes at the ready, take a little time to educate yourself so that you can talk to the staff in hot tub retail showrooms with more confidence.

Our Spa masterclass will arm you with the information needed to view and vet test hot tub features and some of the terms used by spa retailers when they are demonstrating hot tubs to you.

Spa shell & seating

The spa shell is the coloured visible moulded interior that contains the seating in which we sit. The spa shell is usually vacuum-formed from acrylic (typically in a choice of colours and finishes) plus other invisible strengthening layers such as fibreglass, and should be moulded with comfort, ergonomics and durability in mind. It is vital to choose a spa that has a well designed, comfortable shell interior.

with a large enough footwell to accommodate the maximum number of bathers.

Also check how easy it is to move from seat to seat and that there is a good variety of seating depths, not just for different heights of bathers, but also so that you can swap places with other bathers to vary your massage experience or to move from a deeper to a shallower seat if you get too hot or cold whilst in the tub. Wet testing will help you to check that pillows are positioned in the right place for your height and build.

If the spa has a lounge seat (a full body-length seat where the bather is positioned in a more reclined position – like sitting on a garden lounger), check that it conforms to your body without the feeling of floating out of the seat. A well-designed lounge seat that suits your height and build can counteract this. This can only be checked by wet testing and by consulting with a specialist retailer.

Finally check how easy and safe it is to enter and exit the spa. Is there a defined flat step area as you get in and out of the spa, or grab handles for a sure-footed exit after a glass of wine in the tub?

Spa construction & cabinetry

The inner frame of the spa supports the spa shell and is generally made of either treated timber, metal or synthetic struts. It is important for the long-term integrity of the spa structure. The framework on some cheap ‘grey imports’ is constructed using untreated timber, which will not within the first few years of a spa’s lifecycle so be sure to check this out before you buy.

The floor of the spa is integral to the spa frame and is important, as this is where the spa will come into contact with the base that you have prepared. Ask your retailer how the base of the spa is constructed, it should be protected by some kind of waterproof membrane or material to prevent any dampness from permeating up inside the cabinet.

The spa cabinet is the outer cladding that protects the inside of the spa from the elements and provides the aesthetic finish to the area below the shell. Cabinets are most commonly made from timber, such as cedar or teak, or synthetic materials that replicate the look of wood.

Avoid cheap imports that use softwood cabinets, as these will rot quickly. Hardwood timber cabinets may weather and require some regular treatment to keep them looking good. Synthetic cabinets are maintenance-free and can be cleaned by hosing or wiping down with a damp cloth.

Top Tip: If you are in any doubt about the construction properties of a spa model, ask a member of showroom staff to remove a cabinet side panel so that you can inspect the interior.

Spa insulation

Most spas have some form of insulation inside the cabinet to retain water temperature and reduce the amount of time that the heater is activated each day. Different levels of insulation are generally available ranging from none at all to ‘fully-foamed’ spas.

Well-constructed and insulated spas are incredibly energy-efficient and this will minimize your running costs. On the other hand, cheap spas with little or no insulation can cost up to ten times as much to run. It is vital that you check this element of the spa build in person by asking for the cabinet panels to be removed so that you can check the insulation.

An added benefit of fully foaming hot tubs is that the insulation supports flexible pipework and prevents movement in pipes as pumps are activated. This will help to minimise the chances of leaks occurring inside the spa over time.

All things being equal, hot tubs with a good combination of shell, cabinet and cover insulation will minimise heat loss and therefore have lower electrical running costs than a similar model with poor insulation. So, like your home, the more insulation the better.

Spa cover

Spas are supplied with an insulated hard cover that is filled with either high density foam or polystyrene. This is then vacuum-wrapped in a sealed waterproof plastic and the final covering is made of vinyl on the outside to protect the cover from the elements. The cover should have lockable clips to secure it to the cabinet to prevent unauthorised access (particularly unsupervised access by children). These clips will also prevent the cover from being blown off and damaged by high winds and also ensure a tight seal when the spa is not in use in order to minimise heat loss and reduce running costs.

Top Tip: Also allow for the fact that the cover folds in half before the cover lifter comes into operation. If you are building a gazebo or pergola over the spa area, make sure you have allowed enough overhead clearance for the cover to be folded over.

Top Tip: Seriously consider investing in a ‘cover lifting system’ to help you to take the cover on and off the spa before and after use. Spa covers can be very cumbersome and heavy, particularly if you are using the spa on your own. There are a large variety of cover lifters available. Bear in mind that different cover lifters will need different amounts of clearance on one or more sides of the spa to allow the cover to be stowed away.

Top Tip: Also allow for the fact that the cover folds in half before the cover lifter comes into operation.
**Pumps & plumbing**

Hot tub pumps provide three main functions:

- To pump the water through the plumbing system to the jets which will convert the flow into a massaging action
- To pump water through the heater to heat the water
- To pump the water through the spa filters to keep the water clean

Instead of looking at pump specifications, simply wet test the spa as this is the ultimate test of how well the pumps are designed and built to provide the very lowest running costs via smart equipment packs and insulation.

**New technologies**

Just when we thought that hot tub manufacturers had hit the wall when it comes to innovation and technology, a whole raft of new features have hit the market in 2012.

Besides automatic water quality monitoring and dosing systems that hit the market in 2011, the latest models from some manufacturers are now coming equipped with remote management software to allow you to programme settings and water temperature from your iPod or smartphone via their latest apps.

**Control panels & remotes**

Control panels have undergone a huge step-change in technological development over the last couple of years. Some spa models still have fairly simplistic control panels that have buttons to activate pumps and lighting. On the other hand, the very latest models have waterproof remote controls, plus extra topside control panel functionality incorporating a range of extra functions by scrolling through the screen menus.

A range of peripheral control panels can be seen on the latest control systems and even underwater control switches have also started to appear on some models. Throw in a raft of smartphone apps to add extra control functionality and it is clear that hot tubs have embraced new technology with both hands!

**Air blowers**

Some spas are equipped with air blowers, which are plumbed to a multitude of air jets around the spa. When switched on, the air system produces the typical jacuzzi bubbling water effect. This produces a light tissue massage rather than targeted hydrotherapy. This is different to air introduced via hydrotherapy jets. The best way to decide if you want a spa with an air blower is to wet test spas with and without and see for yourself.

**Water treatment system**

Filtration is important in spas as the filter performance will dictate how well the spa filters out undissolved wastes without the intervention of chemicals. Well-filtered water will stay clearer and last longer.

**Jets & topside controls**

It is the jets that convert the flow provided by the pumps and plumbing system into a tangible massaging action. Common fallacy is that spas with more jets are more powerful. This is unlikely to be the case unless more pumps are added to provide greater flow rates. The very best spa manufacturers put the right jets in the right places in order to maximise the relaxing effect of hydrotherapeutic massage.

The massage experience can be maximised by placing different types of jets in different seats so that as you move around the spa, each seat feels different and targets a different set of muscle groups and pressure points. Look for spas that have a variety of different jet types, and particularly look for spas that receive, irrespective of what is happening in the seats around them.

**Filtration**

Filtration is important in spas as the filter performance will dictate how well the spa filters out undissolved wastes without the intervention of chemicals. Well-filtered water will stay clearer and feel great. These include ozone systems, inline mineral purifiers and salt-water chlorine and bromine generators. We won’t bore you with the science behind this kit but all of these systems have their merits and should be requested if available.

**Lighting & waterfalls**

Spa lighting is important for both safety after-dark and also to add ambience and mood to the experience. Most spas now have LED multi-coloured lighting of some kind inside the tub, which can be randomly scroll through the colour spectrum or be set to your favourite colour. Backlit pillows, topside controls and jets are also now available. Exterior cabinet lighting is a new feature that adds extra ambience to the spa environment and also provides an after-dark safety benefit to prevent tripping or falling on spa entry or exit.

Waterfalls are also a great way of adding ambience, and some spas have backlit waterfalls for that extra-special after-dark effect. Make sure that waterfalls can be manually turned off for those times when you want a quieter spa environment and when the spa is not in use.

**Multimedia options**

State-of-the-art spas are increasingly becoming available with stereo systems, MP3 compatibility and TV and DVD systems either built in or available as optional extras. Such extras will inevitably increase in popularity but don’t forget that hydrotherapy performance or general build quality so that you can watch The X Factor in your tub!

Hot tubbing is about all-year-round relaxation, escapism and the uninterrupted chance to spend real quality time with your loved ones for at least half-an-hour every day. Don’t miss the opportunity to ditch the TV remote and actually talk to each other instead...you won’t regret a minute of it!
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  - **Page**: 122
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  - **Phone**: 01525 854000
  - **Websites**:
    - [www.azure-pools.co.uk](http://www.azure-pools.co.uk)
    - [www.fenlandarcticspas.co.uk](http://www.fenlandarcticspas.co.uk)

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  - **Page**: 124-125
  - **Address**: Ladds Garden Centre, Country Homes and Gardens, Vauxhall, Bedford, LU5 6HE
  - **Phone**: 01525 875599
  - **Websites**:
    - [www.fitswim.co.uk](http://www.fitswim.co.uk)
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  - **Address**: Aqua Hot Tubs, Ladds Garden Centre, Bath Road, Hare Hatch, Reading, RG10 9SB
  - **Phone**: 0118 940 6002
  - **Websites**:
    - [www.aquatubs.co.uk](http://www.aquatubs.co.uk)
    - [www.hottubsathome.co.uk](http://www.hottubsathome.co.uk)

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  - **Phone**: 01523 227293
  - **Websites**:
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  - **Phone**: 01526 359191
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  - **Address**: Hot Tubs At Home, Unit 5 Saxon Business Park, Toddington, Bedford, MK17 9JX
  - **Phone**: 01525 861510
  - **Websites**:
    - [www.hottubsathome.co.uk](http://www.hottubsathome.co.uk)
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