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Celebrate Autumn in Your Spa

It's autumn. Time to close the pool, cover that fancy barbecue-cum-outdoor kitchen and head indoors. . . or maybe not. There's still plenty of time to enjoy this colorful and invigorating season ensconced in your spa or hot tub. You can sip mulled cider and savor the scenery long after your neighbors have put their swimsuits away.

According to the Northeast Spa & Pool Association (www.nespapool.org), today's backyard pool has evolved from a one-season oasis to a lifestyle amenity to be enjoyed from early spring through late fall. An attached hot tub can be heated for cool-weather enjoyment. And many of today's mini-pool designs make it easy to heat the entire pool for off-season swimming.

"Sitting in warm water when it's hot out isn't nearly as pleasant as being in a hot tub on these cool nights we're starting to have," says Greg Darvin of Pristine Pools in East Hampton (www.swimpristinepools.com). "We have a wonderful night sky out here, and sitting under the stars in the spa on a brisk night is a great experience."

Darvin notes that this year, because of record-high fuel costs, many clients who might have kept their large swimming pools open later in the season are instead opting for the spa. "There's less water to heat," he says, "so the spa is much more cost-effective. It gives you the relaxation, the enjoyment of the water, and the therapeutic benefits of a hot tub."

A shapely pool in Sagaponack designed by Pristine Pools includes a season-spanning spa.

With Long Island's temperate climate, it's possible to take advantage of a spa year-round. "It depends on how they're designed, how they're built, and what amenities are added," Darvin explains. "Freeze-out controls are available. If the temperature drops below a specific fail-safe number, the system will circulate and heat the water to avoid freezing."

So keep your swimsuit handy. Autumn doesn't have to mean the end of enjoying the hot tub for 2008. It could be the beginning of a brand new spa season.

— *Mary Stipe*