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Food/Dining Alfresco dining in North Jersey

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Setting a table and two chairs outside doesn't make a restaurant alfresco, but you wouldn't know it by the number of places that tout their outdoor dining spaces. There are hundreds. How many are legitimately good? Dozens perhaps?

So we set out to find the best of them — 10 restaurants not only serving memorable food but offering customers a space to dine in the elements, absorbing the late-day sun or taking in a cool summer breeze with their dinner.

A few caveats: Restaurants under consideration needed to serve dinner more than four nights a week. They had to be within The Record's coverage area, which is largely Bergen and Passaic counties. And most important, the food had to be good. Really good, as in, a two-star review wouldn't cut it.

Our selections may be surprising. The most saturated restaurant town, Ridgewood, has no restaurants on our list. None even came close. Edgewater, along the Hudson River, has one, but it doesn't have a Manhattan view.

Café Matisse: Chef-owner Peter Loria's restaurant serves contemporary American cuisine with both flair and painstaking precision at one of the region's two four-star establishments. Consider the detail in just the name of this dish: "Peppered lamb loin with truffled goat cheese risotto cake and spicy eggplant jam, broccoli rabe, smoked red pepper vinaigrette and kalamata olive pesto, topped with fried shallots." If you've seen Matisse's colorful, artistic dining room, you'll appreciate how it continues outdoors with a fragrant maze of flowers and plants. 167 Park Ave., Rutherford; 201-935-2995; cafematisse.com.