
Home Additions: What you should know

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By building an addition, you can make your home more liveable, while increasing its value.

Home Additions

It also allows you to stay in a home and neighborhood you like without incurring the expenses and inconvenience of moving. But before you start, there are many things you should know. Find out about building restrictions While you are still in the thinking stage for your home addition, find out from city hall if there are any local zoning ordinances that could affect your project, such as lot setbacks (i.e. the minimum distance required from the adjacent property lines or public right of way to the outermost portion of the structure) and height restrictions.

Also, check with the local building department to see if your home addition will require a building permit, and ensure that you or your contractor gets one prior to starting the project. You could be forced to tear down any work completed without a permit, which would be a major inconvenience and very costly.

Additions come in all shapes and sizes Home additions are becoming increasingly popular across the U.S. to accommodate aging parents (and, unfortunately, in-laws), or even as rental units to generate a monthly income. These additions can include a bedroom, bathroom, sitting room and a private entrance, although the most popular home additions involve adding an extra room onto an exterior wall.

Sunrooms, garages and extra bedrooms are common additions, as well as living rooms, dining rooms and home offices. You may want to consider building up instead of losing lawn and garden space, or building a two-story addition that will accommodate an office or bedroom on top of the garage to maximize space. Other additions, such as carports, porches and decks often require less disruption of your home, yet will still increase its functionality and value.

You can use the Cost Estimator to help you gage the cost of certain types of home additions. If you're adding indoor space, make sure a heating and air conditioning (HVAC) professional is brought in to assess the increased demand on the present system. Continuity works best Something to think about with a home addition is consistency - within your own home and with the neighborhood. First, you want your addition to "fit in" with the rest of the house, both inside and out. That is, you don't want the addition to look like an "add-on," either structurally or in terms of decor.

Similarly, a huge addition to a house in a modest neighborhood will surely give you more space, but when it comes time to sell you may not get the return on your investment you were hoping for, as those who can afford a bigger house will likely look in a more expensive neighborhood.

Choose a contractor that's right for the job When planning your addition, remember that the less impact there is on your present structure, the more cost-effective the addition will be.

For example, moving plumbing walls, radically altering the floor plan and making changes to the roofline will all increase your costs significantly. The complexity of your addition will often determine the type of contractor you need to hire. For example, if you're adding a simple sunroom, a remodeling contractor or a general contractor can do the job.

But if the expansion will affect many parts of your home, or involve significant structural changes, you'll probably need an architect or structural engineer. Assess impact for heating and air conditioning Your head contractor will likely bring in affiliates or subcontractors for specialized jobs, like electrical and plumbing. If you're adding indoor space, make sure that a heating and air conditioning (HVAC) professional is brought in to assess the increased demand that the addition will place on the present system.