



GUTTER Buyers Guide



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What You Need To Know About Gutters

Materials

Gutters come in various materials, sizes and colors. It is no surprise then, why consumers feel so perplexed when it comes to purchasing the right gutter system for their home.

Wood, vinyl, aluminum, steel and copper are some of the materials that gutters and downspouts are made of. Wood is the least popular because of its high maintenance and price. Vinyl is great for do-it-yourselfers and can be found at home-improvement centers. Aluminum gutters are the most common. Primary aluminum is the thickest and most consistent kind. Avoid secondary aluminum, a recycled product that's often plagued by inconsistent thickness. Metal gutters are made in sheet metal shops and require gutter specialists to install them.

Types of Gutters

Sectional types are sold in 10ft. to 22ft. long pieces. They are either made of vinyl, painted aluminum or pre-painted steel. Gutter sections are joined together by snap-in-place connectors. All sectional systems have end caps, corner pieces and drop outlets for connecting to downspouts. The negative to sectional systems is that there is a potential for leaks through the seams. One positive is that they can be installed by either the homeowner or by a professional installer.

Seamless gutters are the most popular type today. The biggest selling point is that they don't have any seams which could potentially leak. The sections join only at inside and outside corners and at downspout outlets. Seamless gutters are usually formed from aluminum that has a baked-on finish, but they may be made from copper or factory-painted steel. They are made with a special machine that's brought to your home by a gutter contractor. These types of gutters can not be installed by do-it-yourselfers.



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Considering the extended number of gutter protection systems available, it is no surprise that choosing the right one for your home can prove to be a cumbersome and lengthy task. In order to help busy home owners make the right decision, we have set out to compare the various systems that can help protect your home from weather related damages.

In order to establish a standard by which we can measure the various gutter protection systems up against, we have compared the various systems relative to the system that is considered the best on the market.

Fully covered gutter systems, such as the one shown at right, provide superior protection from debris, and allow maximum water flow into the system, which helps avoid overflows that can lead to improper drainage around your home.

Many companies offer covered gutter systems, but be aware - not all covered gutters are created equal! A few important items to look for with covered gutters are:

Below are some other systems on the market to compare. As with any major purchase for your home, take the time to learn about each system and then decide what's right for you.

Is the cover nailed to the roof's shingles, or is it tucked under the drip edge of the roof? If it is nailed to the roof's shingles, it can actually void the manufacturer's warranty on your roof, and can cause roof leaks down the line.

Is the gutter cover perforated or solid? Perforations allow a slight slow-down in water flow, giving the water and the gutter cover an opportunity to "bond", thus directing the full flow of water into the gutter trough.

And if aesthetics are important to you, do the gutters allow for a separate top and bottom color? If not, the gutters will be highly visible on your roof. If the system allows you to choose a separate gutter top color and gutter trough color, you can match the top to your roof, and the trough to your trim or siding, providing a seamless look.



Covered Gutter Protection System -vs- Other Gutter Systems



Mesh or Screen Gutter Covers

These metal coverings fit inside against the back of the gutter and across the top acting like a strainer and filter. This design is easy to install and less expensive than the solid types. However, while they reduce the frequency and difficulty of ongoing gutter cleaning, they do not eliminate it. Unsightly debris together with snow and ice can collect on top of the screen and cause it to collapse. Over time, there is also a chance for the screens to rust and stain face of gutter.

Gutter Filters

Sponge-like foam "space fillers" that let water drain through but keep leaves from building up in the bottom of the trough. These fillers do not have the capacity to handle heavy rain and water flow, and may cause overflow during heavy rain. Snow and ice can also settle in to the foam, harboring the potential for ice damming, sagging and overflowing.

Solid Gutter Covers

Made of vinyl or aluminum, these solid gutter covers snap onto the top front of the gutter and slip under your shingles, altering roofline and appearance. They are nailed to your roof which pierces shingles, roof felt and decking, possibly voiding roof warranty or causing leaks. Gutter covers may also blow off in high wind conditions and due to the lack of support, they are very vulnerable to damage from weight of debris, snow, or ice.

Solid Gutter Covers with Slots

Most of the solid cover gutter guards rely on the principle of "water adhesion". The water enters the gutter through slots or small holes located underneath a lip or on the vertical side. These gutters do not keep out all small twigs, dirt, asphalt roofing granules, and pine needles. They perform inadequately in very heavy rain falls or on steep roofs and may not be considered visually appealing.

Gutter Brushes

Most, but not all, leaves and large debris will pass over gutter brushes. Small items that get caught near the top of the gutter brush either blow away or decompose over time. However, over time, the dirt, small twigs and pine needles that do not pass through the gutter brush may create a layer of 'gunk' in the bottom of the gutter which may cause staining and require periodic gutter cleaning.

How to Select a Gutter System

Good gutters should be an integral part of a home's exterior. Old, damaged or defective rain gutters can cause a lot of damage. When a gutter clogs, the water is not diverted properly and overflows into either the house or foundation. This can cause wood rot, foundation problems and landscaping erosion. In addition to damage to your home, a rain gutter clogged with soggy leaves and debris is the perfect breeding ground for mold and mildew, as well as mosquitoes and other pests. When considering a new gutter system, a home owner must take several things into account: among them, price, aesthetics and how the rain gutter needs to perform depending on the area in which they live. Does the area have extreme temperatures, heavy snow and rain, or ice storms? Are there a lot of trees in the vicinity? All these questions need to be taken into consideration when deciding on what type of rain gutter system to install.

Design

If the primary purpose of gutters is to collect water from the roof and direct it away from the home where it could cause damage, then the first thing you want to know is whether or not your gutter system is properly designed. Good systems drain in such a way as to keep water out from under your foundation while keeping your fascia, siding and paint dry.

Material

There are several different types of material used to make rain gutters. Vinyl is great for do-it-yourselfers and can be found at home-improvement centers. The gutters can be easily installed by the homeowner because they are simple to cut and configure. The drawback to a vinyl gutter is that it is susceptible to brittleness with age and extreme cold.

Aluminum, another popular choice, is more prone to denting, but its color weathers well. It is very adaptable and most often used in seamless rain gutter systems. Aluminum is the most common product used today. The gutter holds more water than traditional wood gutters, and this is the product which is generally recommended.

Less frequently used materials include galvanized and stainless steel. Copper is also an attractive choice, but more expensive than the rest. Copper also requires a more expert installer. Wood is another material used for rain guttering, most often in restoration projects.

Type

The two main types of rain gutter systems are sectional and seamless. Sectional systems lend themselves more to do-it-yourself installations due to the high configurability of the parts. They are made up of either vinyl or aluminum sections that are fastened together.

A drawback of sectional rain gutters is that the joints are prone to developing leaks. Gutter add-ons, such as screens and filters, help these basic rain gutters stay clog free. A gutter topper is a covering which allows water to flow along a contoured “lip” which feeds into your rain gutter. This keeps debris and animals out of your rain gutter.

The second type of rain gutter system is the seamless rain gutter. This is a no-clog system which catches and routes water down and out while diverting leaves and debris to the ground. This type of rain gutter is quickly becoming a favorite choice due to its durability, seamless appearance and easy maintenance.

Gutter Covers

Gutter covers are used to help keep gutters clear of debris and they are getting better and better each generation. Initially, manufacturers produced galvanized, vinyl-coated metal or plastic screens. More recently, cover-like gutter guards have been introduced. Some snap into place; others roll out of the factory with gutter and cover molded into one piece. Unless you live in an area with few trees or you enjoy climbing up on a ladder and cleaning out gutters, you probably want to consider some kind of cover or guard.



Choosing a Gutter Contractor

The first thing you want to ask when getting an estimate is what gauge the aluminum is. Coil stock is sold in several thicknesses, including .032, .027, and .025 inch. The general rule of thumb is that thicker is better so be sure to specify the thicker .032 material.

Next you want to compare the price, the durability, maintenance requirements and warranties when buying gutters. The price of gutters range from about \$4 to \$20 per linear foot depending on the material you choose.

Finally, check the warranty. For gutters and accessories, look for a warranty that runs at least 20 years, though a lifetime backing is preferable. For labor, one-year coverage is the minimum. Also be sure the contractor has completion insurance, which continues coverage on the gutters if he goes out of business.

To ensure proper installation, check references, and drive by finished jobs. Ask your friends, neighbors and co-workers for suggestions. Check the local Better Business Bureau website. These are all good resources. You might also contact professional associations, the yellow pages, the Internet or ads in your local area. Just make sure you choose one with extensive knowledge of and experience with a variety of gutter systems and one that has an iron-clad policy of standing behind its products and installation. You'll also want to make sure your contractor is:

- licensed, insured and bonded
- financially stable
- an approved installer of a particular system
- committed to quality control and safety procedures

You might also look at these helpful websites:

- National Association of the Remodeling Industry
www.nari.org
- National Association of Home Builders
www.nahb.org
- Better Business Bureau
www.bbb.org



Glossary of Gutter Terms

Here are some terms you should be aware of when reading an estimate from a contractor.

Downspout

A pipe that carries rainwater from a roof gutter down to a drain or to the ground.

Drip-Edge Extension

Prevents water from washing over the fascia eventually causing it to rot. If your fascia boards have black streaks on them, that usually means that the drip-edge is failing and the contractor may suggest adding an extension for an additional charge.

Fascia Angle

If there is any fascia board that is angled to follow the roof rafters, there is usually an extra charge.

Fascia Board

The flat horizontal surface right below the edge of a roof.

Glossary of Gutter Terms

Fascia Replacement

New gutters need a solid fascia surface upon which to be mounted. If rotted boards need to be replaced, there is a charge per linear feet. Fascia boards narrower than 3” in width must be built out to provide proper support for hanging your new gutters and require an additional charge per linear feet.

Gauge

The thickness or the gauge of the gutter is very important. Primary aluminum is the thickest and most consistent available. The gauges range from .019 to .032 inches. The optimal thickness is .032 inches so when buying aluminum gutters, insist on primary aluminum, which is the best.

Mitres (Corners)

When a company fabricates the corners onsite using the same material as the rest of the house, the advantage is that there is one seam instead of 3 and it’s a cleaner look overall.

Run Height

The height (in stories) at which each gutter run will be located (1st story, 2nd story etc.). This is used to determine the length of downspout needed.

Run Length

A straight section of gutter mounted against the fascia board. It is measured in linear feet, which measures the same as regular feet.

Seamless Gutter Machine

The chosen gutter material is rolled through the forming machine to create a continuous piece of gutter that is custom sized to your home.