

Swimming pools: Take plunge carefully

Thinking of buying a swimming pool? Here are some suggestions that can save you money and aggravation before taking the plunge.

Before you do anything, sit down and make a list of all the reasons you want a pool: relaxation, recreation, fitness, fun for the kids, whatever.

The write down the negative aspects of owning a pool: initial cost, chemically treating the water, cleaning filters, annual winterizing, number of months of use. Now weigh the two and, if you're still keen, read on.

ASSESS NEEDS
Develop some idea of the kid of pool you want before you consult a builder. If you enjoy diving,

your pool should be at least 8'6" deep to accommodate a 24-inch diving stand. If you have small children, you'll need an adequate shallow area and will probably want a safety float line built in.

If you entertain often, you'll need a deck large enough to accommodate your guests. Whatever your reasons for wanting a pool, make sure you

incorporate them into the design specifications.

LOCATION OF POOL
The location is important and should be carefully considered. It's best to situate your pool near the house for convenience and also to permit a view of activities in and around the pool from inside the house.

A well-chosen sunny spot is not only pleasant for bathers, but assists in heating the water. You may also want to put a hedge around your pool, in addition to a fence—which is mandatory in Ontario—for further protection from prevailing winds. This can mean added weeks of use both in spring and fall. Large trees are undesirable near the pool since falling leaves and seeds create problems.

CONSTRUCTION
The most common types of in-ground pools are the concrete and vinyl liner. The concrete pool is the most expensive but is generally considered the best. It

should be constructed by professionals who have the equipment and experience to handle the job.

Briefly, here's how it's done. After the location, size and shape are determined, the site is surveyed and excavated. A network of reinforcing steel bars is then formed in the shape of the pool and tied in place to avoid shifting during application of the concrete. After all placements, fittings and connections are properly installed, the concrete is applied.

Next, the coping and deck are installed. (Coping provides a convenient handhold for swimmers and a slip-proof surface for those standing at the pool's edge.) Smooth frost-proof tiling is then applied around the pool from the coping to just below the water line to protect the pool wall from oil and scum.

Final preparation of the pool shell is the application of either tile, marbolite plaster or

paint. The only remaining step is to connect the filter and other external water-handling and treatment equipment and start the pool in operation.

Vinyl liner pools are very popular because they're cheaper than concrete. These are generally constructed with a pre-engineered frame of aluminum, steel or fiberglass and installed with a semi-solid or solid bottom for support of the total weight of water. Because the structure is not watertight, a vinyl liner is placed inside to contain the water and provide an easy-to-maintain finish.

If an in-ground pool can't be installed because of solid rock or high water-table conditions, consider an above-ground pool. Some models can be installed with sloped bottom, decking around the top and an attached fence or railing assembly. The simpler, less-expensive types, frequently pictured in department

store catalogues, are made of galvanized steel or treated aluminum with a vinyl liner.

CHOOSE A BUILDER
Selecting a builder that charges a fair price and provides good workmanship is one of the most important steps in the process. That's why it's important to shop around.

Get a minimum of three estimates, but be especially careful that each one is based on exactly the same materials and labor. Most estimates should figure in roughly the same price range; be just as wary of an unusually low quote as a suspiciously high one.

Ask around and talk to all the pool-owners you know. Learn through other people's experiences. Are they happy with their investment? Most builders are members of the Ontario Swimming Pool Association, which requires its members to follow a rigid code of ethics. The 20-year-old association offers guidance and assistance to consumers and can be contacted at 6 Lansing Square, Suite 217, Willowdale M2J 1T5, tel: (416) 496-1917.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
Before you sign a contract, make sure you understand every word in it. Each single item of expense for materials and labor, including optional equipment, should be covered in writing. The equipment size, brand and quantity should also be specified.

Moreover, the total cost, payment structure and financing arrangement should be clearly stated. Be sure you know whether you or your builder is responsible for applying to your municipal building department for a permit and whether the cost for installing electrical, water and fuel lines is included in the total or to be paid for separately. Know, too, who's responsible for hiring and paying subcontractors.

The warranty should be clear; what is warranted by the manufacturer, by the seller and by the installer and what action can be taken in case of trouble. All promises and representations made to you orally must also be included in writing in your contract.



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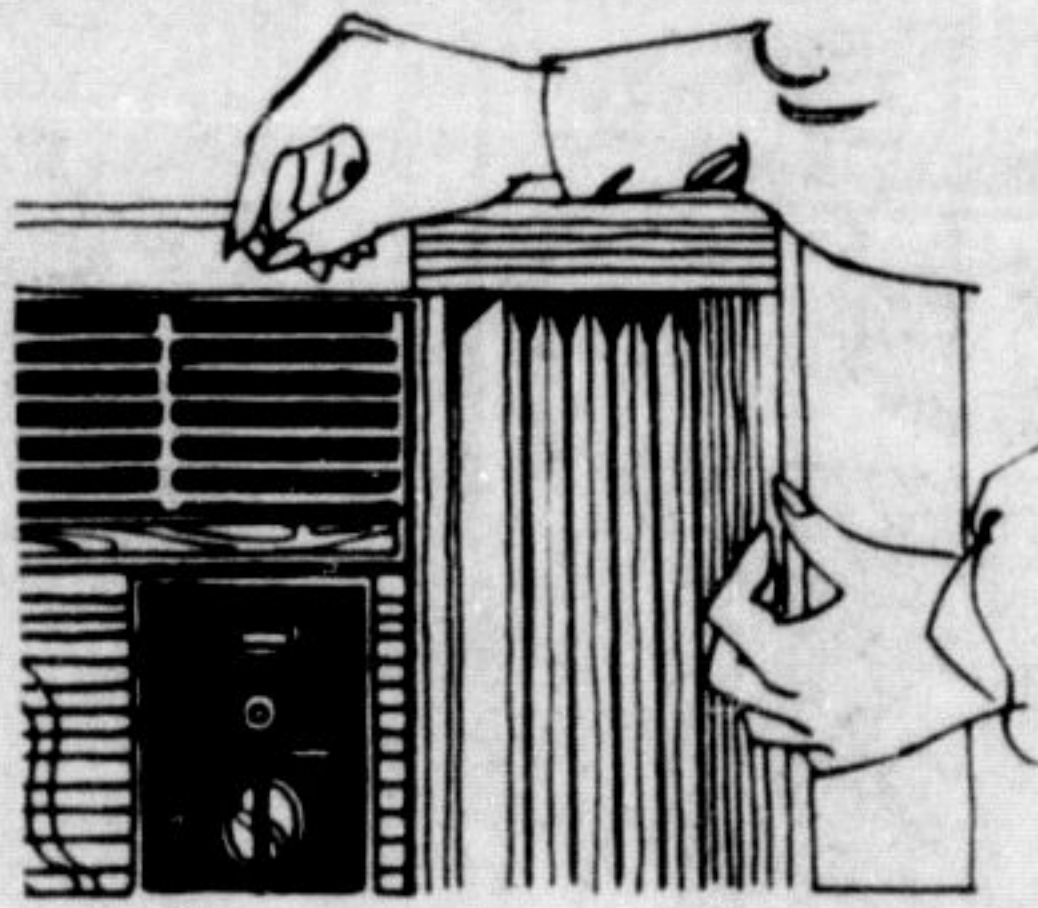


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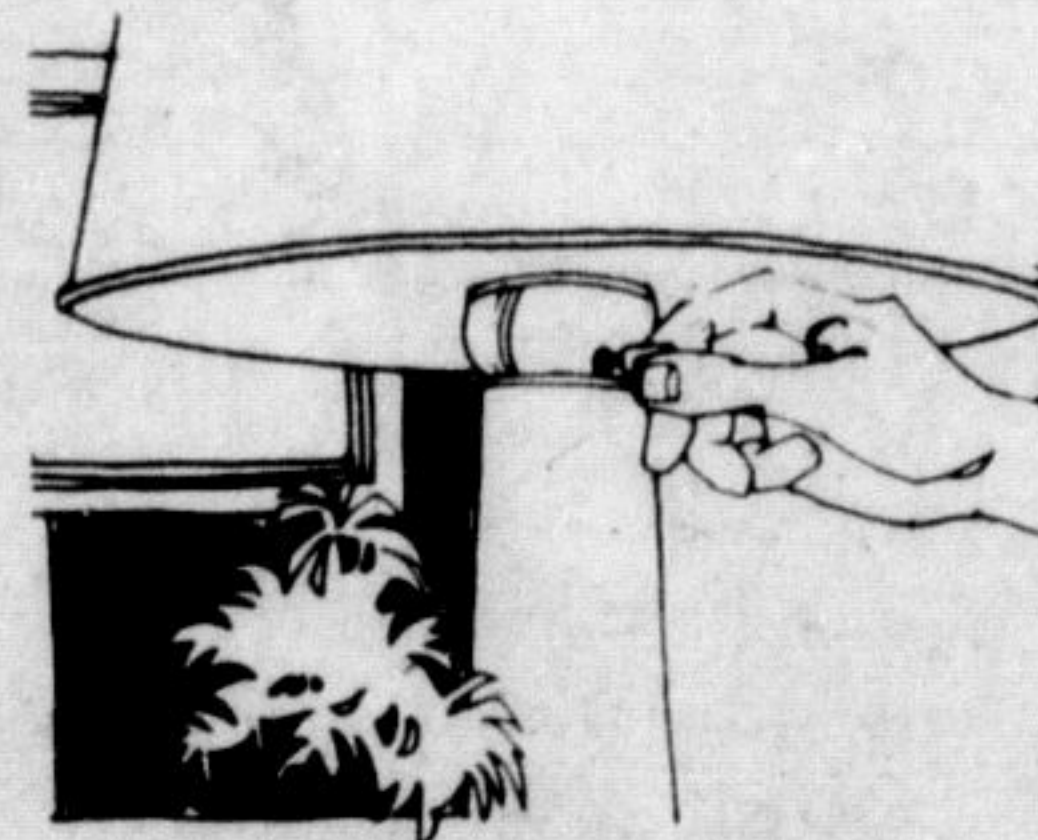
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