

A deck is a great way to enjoy the outdoors

Planning it can be more fun than building it

Once again, it's the time of year when homeowners' thoughts turn to building a deck

If you really relish the great outdoors, you may plan to build a deck to enhance your outdoor living season right through to the fall. Whether simple or elaborate, decks are popular do-it-yourself projects that the whole family can take part in planning.

Nestled in the privacy of your own backyard, a deck can provide you with a multi-function play/entertainment/utility area or a cosy, secluded retreat.

Before you start putting your ideas down on paper, think about how you're going to use your deck. How elaborate do you want it to be? Do you want an entertainment area designed for more formal occasions, or do you want a general, multi-purpose area? Do you plan to incorporate a hot tub? Are you building your deck around an existing pool or do you plan on having one installed at a future date?

Decks can greatly enhance a property and can actually make room out of space which was previously unusable — particularly if your property is situated on an incline.

Plan Carefully

Whatever route you take, make sure you carefully define your needs and budget before getting started. Also take your overall landscape into account when planning. Do you want to enhance a panoramic view? Are there certain things

you'd either like to highlight or camouflage?

If you have several beautiful shade trees in your yard, for instance, you may want to build your deck around them, instead of trying to avoid them altogether by simply building a smaller deck.

In fact, your deck can pretty well be as flexible as your budget and imagination; decks can be multi-tiered and can extend around the entire circumference of a home — depending, of course, on available space and local building codes.

Decks can also be built on top of existing structures, like a flatroofed garage or an extension. (However, it's a good idea to consult a building specialist if you choose this option).

If you want to create separate areas for different functions, you can build a multi-level deck, or several, smaller adjoining decks, visually separated by attractive flowers or shrubs.

You may also want to incorporate other items that will enhance your deck, such as built-in benches and planters.

Weather

You should also take the weather in your area into account before proceeding too far with your plans. Which way do the prevailing winds blow? If wind is a potential problem, you may simply want to install walls around your deck to shelter it. You may also want to install some sort of roofing, such as lath or plastic, depending on your preference.

A trellis roof, for example, provides an

excellent surface on which to hang attractive plants.

When planning your deck, also take note of the amount of sunshine it will get. Generally, a deck with a southern exposure should get a consistent amount of sunshine; a deck built on the northern side of a house would receive more limited sunlight.

Once you've decided on the type of deck you want and the function it will serve, be sure to incorporate the appropriate safety measures into your design. Railings, for instance, are essential if you have small children.

Be sure too, to check your local building regulations. Chances are, you'll probably need a building permit.

If you plan to build the deck yourself, you should talk to the experts at your local building supply centre to determine

what you'll require in terms of supplies.

Your budget and personal preference will help you decide which type of wood you'll use.

Decks can be stained or painted. Many homeowners choose to use pressure-treated wood because it provides better protection against rot and insect damage. Some people prefer cedar.

If you plan to install an elaborate deck, you may want to consult experts to see if your plans are feasible. You may also want to hire a contractor to build it.

No matter which way you choose to go, once your deck is complete, you can sit back and enjoy the pleasures of spring and summer outdoor living.

□ This article is provided by local realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.

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