

How To Avoid The Pitfalls Of Hiring A Deck Contractor



Thank you for downloading this helpful article from ModernDecks.ca, originally published by *Canada Mortgage And Housing* (we modified it a bit to address the concerns of people, like yourself, hiring deck and fence contractors).

My construction team and I take great pride in the work we do and it's important to all of us, here, that you understand that we're a partner in the project with you – that it's not “just another” deck or fence line to any of us.

It's the place that you call home.

We respect that and we'll treat it like our own and treat *you* like family.

Please read the following helpful tips on hiring a contractor and, if you have any questions, then please call me and I'll make sure that you get the answers that need to feel confident in taking the next step in the building process.

I look forward to helping you get started,

Alan Poullis
Master Craftsman
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How to find and choose a contractor

When choosing a contractor, start by asking for referrals from family, friends or neighbours who've had similar work done on their homes. You can also find the names of qualified contractors from your local home builders' or renovators' association, building supply stores, through your local municipal building department or on the Internet.

Once you have a list of recommendations, meet with a few contractors in person and ask them any questions you can think of, including these:

- How long have you been in business?
- What is your warranty?
- Do you have competitive pricing?
- How much experience do you have?
- Are you covered under workers compensation WSIB?
- Can we see any of your work or talk to past customers get references?
- Are you registered with Better Business Bureau?
- Do you have liability insurance?
- Are you going to secure all necessary permits?
- What are your payment terms and schedules?
- Will you provide a FREE detailed, written estimate?
- Will you use your own crew or will you subcontract any part of the job?

These first meetings are mainly just to get to know the potential candidates and their work. So do some research first to find out what to ask, and take notes so you'll remember how each contractor answered your questions.

A contractor who can't or won't answer your questions, they may not be the right person for the job. After all, this is a big decision. Don't feel rushed into anything, and never sign anything or pay any money until you're sure who you want to hire.

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Once you've made your shortlist, call the references each of the contractors gave you, and ask them a few questions about how their projects went, for example:

- Were they satisfied with the quality of the work?
- Did the contractor keep them informed throughout the project?
- Did they run into any problems?
- Was everything completed on schedule?
- Did the contractor go over the originally quoted budget?
- Would they use the contractor again, or recommend the contractor to their family and friends?

It can also be a good idea to check with your local Better Business Bureau to be sure the contractors you're considering are all members in good standing. It's important then to check with your municipal building department to find out if the work can be done, and whether any special permits or zoning approvals are required.

Getting estimates

When you've decided which contractors might be a good fit, ask them for a detailed written estimate that spells out the work that will be required to do the job, how long it should take to complete and how much the project will cost. Getting a good idea of the costs up front will help you decide whether or not you want to go ahead with the project before you invest too much time in it.

There are no hard and fast rules for how many estimates you should get, but most homeowners find that three detailed estimates are usually enough to make an informed decision. The important thing is that you feel you have enough information to make the right choice.

When asking for estimates, be as specific as you can about exactly what you're looking for—for instance, what kind of finishes do you want? What style or look do you prefer? Do you want a deck or fence that will last for 10 years, or 30?

The cost of a project can vary considerably depending on the type, quality and brand of materials. Being specific about what you want will help make sure the estimates you get are all based on the same requirements.

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Once you receive the estimates, compare them carefully to make sure everything you asked for is included. Assume anything that isn't specifically listed in the estimate will involve an extra cost and possibly take more time to complete. And avoid the temptation to automatically go with the lowest price.

What you really want in a contractor is someone you can communicate with, who will provide good quality work at a fair price, and give you the best overall value for your money.

Get it in writing!

Finally, once you've decided who you're going to hire, always get a written contract. While the offer of a discount if you pay in cash may be tempting, without a written contract, you could lose your deposit, end up with poor quality work, or find yourself being charged much more than you expected.

Once you have the contract, make sure it includes a construction schedule with a start and end date, as well as a payment schedule that sets out how much you'll have to pay at each stage of the job, and when.

Remember: don't sign anything until you've read the contract carefully, are sure you understand what it says, and are satisfied that it describes exactly what you want—and includes everything you've been promised.

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Source: based on [CMHC's online help guide to hiring a contractor](#)

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