

a craftsman's work and verify references from each contractor before hiring anyone to work on the property.

Homeowners who want to include traditional hardware and other period details in their homes may be able to find quality replicas of historic milling materials, while others may want to scour antique shops or salvage yards for era-appropriate materials.

Historic renovations can be costly and have a tendency to go over budget because of unforeseen damage and hazards that have to be repaired so the building is up to code. Going into the project with this in mind can help soften the blow of extra costs down the road.

Historic homes can be beautiful and appeal to buyers who appreciate the one-of-a-kind nature of older properties. Renovating historic homes may take time and money, but the results may be well worth the effort.

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The Do's and Don'ts of Backyard Fire Pits

Once a rarity, fire pits have grown increasingly popular in recent years, as more and more homeowners turn their homes into private oases. Fire pits run the gamut from the very simple to the more elaborate, and the fire pits homeowners choose often depend on the space they have available as well as their budgets.

But even homeowners without any space or budget constraints should give careful consideration to which fire pit they ultimately install, especially if they plan to make that installation themselves.

The following are some do's and don'ts of fire pits for those homeowners about to add this relaxing and popular accessory to their backyards.

DO confirm you can legally build a fire pit in your yard.

Fire pits have become so commonplace that homeowners may think there are no regulations governing their construction. However, it's still best to confirm with your local government planning or zoning offices if you can build a fire pit and if any restrictions apply.

DON'T proceed with the project until you have been granted official approval.

Assuming you have the go-ahead to build a fire pit is not the same thing as knowing you have been approved.

Starting early could result in fines if it turns out you aren't allowed to have a fire pit. But you may also begin building a bigger fire pit than the local government allows, and that could be money down the drain later. Wait until you get official word before you proceed with the project.

DO build on flat ground.

The fire pit should be built on flat ground to reduce risk of accident and/or injury. A fire pit built on flat ground also means everyone can enjoy it comfortably and equally once the project is finished. If the ground around the pit is not flat, some people may be forced to sit crooked or lean forward just to enjoy the pit.

DON'T build near flammable structures.

Build the fire pit far enough away from existing structures, such as your home, garage or shed, so flickering flames do not catch some wind and lead to disaster. Before building in a given spot, monitor the wind patterns for a few days by sitting in a lawn chair at the spot you ultimately want the fire pit to be. If you notice the wind is blowing toward your house, you will want to choose another area for the pit so smoke from the fire will not be blowing into your home every night.

DO choose the right size.

The size of your fire pit will depend on the space you have available, but even if you have a vast swath of space, keep in mind that professional contractors typically recommend building a fire pit no bigger than 44 inches wide. Anything larger can be unsightly and may not appeal to prospective buyers down the road. In addition, an especially large fire pit may result in potentially unruly flames that can present a fire hazard.

DON'T go at it alone if your DIY skills are suspect

Installing a fire pit is a relatively inexpensive DIY job, but that does not mean anyone can do it. Ground needs to be excavated and the slope of the yard must be measured so the fire pit is safe and functional for years to come. If your DIY skills are not up to snuff, hire a professional contractor so your backyard oasis does not become a costly headache.

A fire pit can turn a boring backyard into a relaxing retreat. But homeowners must adhere to the do's and don'ts of fire pits to ensure their retreat is something they can enjoy for years to come.

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