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Decks and patios are an extension of the indoor living space—the most desired outdoor feature of a home. They have become popular spaces for entertaining, barbecuing, relaxing and children’s play. And decks and patios are practical and valuable additions, as they typically recoup most of their original construction cost.

Each year millions of Americans add decks or patios onto their homes, not only for entertainment reasons, but also to add value to their property. If you want a deck or patio that holds its value and provides years of entertainment, you should plan to make the most of your building experience.

Planning

Since a deck or patio is a major addition, don’t jump into it, plan ahead. It is important to know the answers to some very relevant questions. Are you building for entertaining, relaxing or both? Consider the amenities you want the space to have. If you enjoy entertaining, perhaps you’ll want to include a built-in cooking center. For family use, an economical, modest size deck or patio large enough for relaxing and dining outdoors may serve your purpose nicely.

Consider how many people will be using the space. Be realistic about your space needs. Recommended dimensions provide for 20 sq. ft. per person—a space that is comfortable but not excessive. If you are using the space for entertaining, you may want to allow more space for built-in seating, circular eating areas, a hot tub or spa.

Other important considerations are: when it will be used (lighting), who will be using it (safety and accessibility) and how it will be used (privacy). Planning is important. A well designed space, large or small, should be determined well before the construction process begins.

Investment

Begin by studying your local real estate market to be sure you’re making improvements that homebuyers want and will pay for. Manage your money and develop a practical budget. A reserve of 10 to 20 percent of your budget should cover unexpected costs or changes.

While decks and patios are fairly straightforward home construction projects, many homeowners lack the time, tools and experience to handle the complex installation problems. Working with a competent professional will help avoid the mistakes and design pitfalls that can stop inexperienced do-it-yourselfers in their tracks.

Develop a working timeline that allows plenty of leeway to finish the project. In most municipalities, you need a building permit before you begin. Be sure to check building

codes to learn about specific standards, restrictions and regulations.

Remember that the space is an extension of your home. Therefore, echo the architectural style of your home when choosing the shape, style and materials. Try to keep your selection limited to no more than two building materials. This actually gives you more flexibility in the construction process and in the final finishing stage.

Use of too many different materials can lead to the area being too complex and result in a poorly executed construction. Even a single material will give you a very effective look if combined with the appropriate landscaping and outdoor furniture.

A deck or patio provides a casual transition to the beautiful outdoors. It’s a great way to enhance the value of your home.

