

How to Build a Sauna

Not so long ago, visiting a sauna required a membership to a gym, spa, or recreational facility. Building a sauna was considered an arduous task better left to the experts. Early saunas required a large space, often even a dedicated room, and were costly and labor-intensive to set up. In recent years, however, it's become more and more popular—and less expensive—for enthusiasts to build their own private saunas to use in the comfort of their own home.

Why build your own sauna?

In a word, convenience. For those who enjoy the numerous health benefits and relaxing properties of a sauna, the experience can be downright addictive, increasing the appeal of having one close at hand. A private sauna makes it easy to enjoy therapeutic heat sessions whenever your schedule permits, so there's no need to race to the gym early in the morning or late at night.

Many people appreciate the ensured hygiene of a private sauna. Although most facilities take measures to prevent the proliferation of bacteria in public saunas, some folks aren't willing to take the chance. For those who are very modest, building a home sauna provides the opportunity to fully enjoy each session without the wariness that can come with sharing a sauna with multiple people.

The process of building your own sauna requires careful planning and preparation to prevent unwanted surprises. Before you pick up the first plank of wood, there are several questions you need to ask yourself:

What level of effort are you willing to put in to build your sauna?

For those with not a lot of time but plenty of money to spend, a pre-built sauna kit may be a viable option. These ready-made saunas come complete with all wood, rocks, heaters, and other necessary materials, and require only a couple hours of assembly. It's important to work closely with the manufacturer to ensure that all materials are cut to fit your specified dimensions.

If you prefer a more custom sauna, you can order a pre-cut kit that requires a little more effort, but still provides general direction. If you're a true do-it-yourself type, you may be up for the challenge of building your own sauna entirely from scratch. In general, the more effort you're willing to expend, the less money you'll spend in the long run.

A good first step is to contact a sauna manufacturer and ask them to send you literature to inspire some ideas. The Internet also provides a wealth of information, including step-by-step instructions on how to build your own

sauna. We also recommend that you speak extensively with those who have experience constructing a sauna to get their tips, insights, and caveats.

What do you plan to use for your sauna heat source?

There are many options for fueling a sauna, including infrared heat, traditional electric heaters, wood-burning stoves, or gas. Often, your home's location will be a deciding factor. For instance, if you live in a remote or rural area, an electric heat source may be difficult to obtain, while a city address may not have convenient access to a wood source.

The natural aroma of wood makes it a preferred choice for traditionalists, but it can be quite a chore to obtain the amount of wood required for each session. Pre-cut kindling is available, but can get expensive if you plan to use your sauna frequently. It can also be a bit messy, as you'll need to dispose of the ashes. The installation of a wood-burning stove also requires clearance with your insurance company.

Electric stoves serve as a more convenient option for those who don't have the time or inclination to gather or dispose of wood. Electricity is the source of power for infrared saunas, which have quickly risen in popularity in recent years.

For the budget-minded sauna enthusiast, gas provides an economical alternative. It's easy to obtain, clean-burning, and less expensive than electric heat sources. As with any gas power supply, you should install a reliable carbon monoxide monitor to alert you to potentially unsafe levels.

Where will you build your sauna?

With enough time and money, you can build a sauna in any area of your home—in the bathroom, the basement, a garage, or outdoors in a completely separate building. The first consideration is whether your sauna will be placed indoors or outdoors. Often, this will be determined by your chosen heat source.

If you'll be building an electric sauna, it may be easier to install it inside, as it will need to be in close proximity to a source of electricity. On the other hand, a traditional wood-burning sauna might be more conveniently placed outdoors near your wood supply. Plumbing is another important factor, as most saunas require drains and a water source.

When allocating a space for your sauna, you'll need to decide how big you want it to be, how many people will be using it at any given time, and whether it needs to include a shower or changing area.

Special considerations

Before getting started, it's a good idea to sketch out your preferred design on a piece of graph paper. No matter how rudimentary, a sketch will help your vision begin to materialize.

Keep in mind that you'll need to apply a moisture barrier to your sauna structure to keep steam and heat sealed inside.

Electrical wiring needs to be fully protected from moisture to prevent electrical shock.

Proper ventilation is necessary to ensure healthy oxygen levels.

Once your sauna is complete, take good care of it. Regular cleaning and maintenance will help to ensure that all of your hard work results in many years of reliable service.

With careful planning and the necessary precautions, it can be easy and fun to build your own sauna. Today's technologies make it possible for nearly anyone to enjoy their relaxing, therapeutic heat without leaving the comfort of home.