

Contractor Checklist

By Nicole Nichols-West

- Type of contractor**
 - Home building** You will probably need a full time general contractor to build a house, as they will have the appropriate contacts and relationships with subcontractors - electricians, plumbers, etc.
 - Renovations** A small time contractor who will pitch in himself is a good choice - smaller jobs can be more cost effective if the foreman is also working.
 - Landscaping** A contractor who specializes in landscaping is your best bet as they will have the right contacts - nurseries, greenhouses, etc.
 - Light remodeling** Look for a specialist in the area you are remodeling - some contractors specialize in kitchens and baths, for example.
- References**
 - Recommendations** Ask for the names and numbers of past clients you can check with who will vouch for quality of work done, budget adherence, and professionalism.
 - Personal references** Ask for names and numbers of people who will vouch for personal integrity.
 - Legal** Check to see if the contractor has any lawsuits pending.
 - Online** Google the contractor in search of any information - good or bad.
 - BBB** Check with the Better Business Bureau to see if any complaints have been filed.
- Interviewing**
 - Company history** How long has the contractor been in business? It's best to select a contractor who has been in business at least 5 years.
 - Goals** Ask the contractor to explain clearly the solution he suggests to reach your goals.
 - Quality standards** Ask what guidelines the contractor uses to determine his quality standards.
 - Professional designation** Ask if the contractor has a specialty designation in any category of home improvement/remodeling.
 - Trade membership** A contractor who is the member of a trade association is more likely to be up to date on current materials, codes and methods.
 - Price** Ask the contractor for a final bid in writing that includes a detailed account of how budgeted funds will be allocated.
- Requirements**
 - Insurance** Your contractor should carry workman's compensation for anyone injured on your property. They should also carry general liability insurance in case they damage your property.
 - Licensing** If you live in a region where licensing is required, make sure your contractor is properly certified and up to date.
 - Permits** The contractor should demonstrate capability to acquire all the required permits as applicable by local law.

- Contract**
 - Start/end dates** There should be a clear timeline for job completion.
 - Payment** You can expect to pay a deposit upfront and to supply payments at milestones, but the final payment should not be released until the job is completed to your satisfaction.
 - Warranty** This should be spelled out in the contract with all parties under obligation clearly identified.
 - Dispute resolution** Especially if the job is large, a mediation process should be agreed upon in case of conflict.
 - Clean up** Unless you want to be left with a mess, make clean-up by the contractor one of the stipulations for release of final payment.
 - Penalties** Write a per day penalty into the contract that will deduct from the price of the job if the contractor does not finish in the time frame agreed upon.
 - Bonus** Likewise, a bonus can be offered for completion of the job earlier than planned - but make sure your contractor doesn't cut corners to finish early.