



EASY AND INEXPENSIVE

HARD AND EXPENSIVE



Item	1	2	3	4	5
Ground-floor construction	Slab on grade	Single-level joists over minimum-height crawlspace	Single-level joists over varying-height crawlspace	Multilevel joists over varying-height crawlspace	Multilevel joists over full-height basement
Exterior-wall construction	Straight stud walls supporting 8-ft.-high ceilings and flat or gable-roof framing	Straight stud walls supporting 9-ft.- to 10-ft.-high ceilings and flat or gable-roof framing	Straight stud walls supporting varying-height flat/sloped ceilings and flat/gable/hip roof framing	Straight and curved stud walls supporting varying-height ceilings and flat/gable/hip roof framing	Straight and curved walls supporting various ceiling and roof shapes; rain-screen-wall construction
Exterior-wall finish	Stained/painted exterior plywood; wood trim at doors, windows, and corners	Stucco on front wall; painted wood or fiber-cement siding elsewhere; wood trim at doors, windows, and corners	Stucco or B-grade painted/stained wood siding on all walls; wood trim at windows, doors, corners, and eaves/soffits	Brick or A-grade stained-wood siding on all walls; wood trim at windows, doors, corners, wall base, and eaves/soffits	Stone, clear vertical-grain wood siding, or unique finishes on all walls; wood trim everywhere, including porches and balconies
Exterior doors	Brushed-aluminum sliding-glass doors	Powder-coated aluminum sliding-glass doors; painted steel and hinged wood doors	Clad-wood sliding-glass doors; fiberglass or stained/clear finish hinged wood doors	Painted or stained wood French doors with standard muntin pattern; matching sidelite panels	Clad-wood French doors with custom muntin pattern; matching sidelite and transom panels
Windows	Brushed-aluminum or vinyl sliding windows in standard sizes	Powder-coated aluminum or good-grade vinyl sliding windows in standard sizes	Painted/stained wood or fiberglass windows in standard sizes	Top-grade painted/stained wood or clad-wood windows in regular muntin pattern; standard sizes	Painted/stained wood, clad wood, or steel windows in custom sizes and shapes
Roof shape and construction	Gable or flat; rectangular plan; prefabricated wood trusses	Gable; L-, T-, H-, or U-shaped plan; solid-lumber framing	Gable, hip, shed, and/or flat roof; solid and engineered lumber	Combination of common roof forms; dormers; clerestories	Combination of unique roof forms; lumber and steel framing
Roofing material	Asphalt shingles; built-up roof	Premium laminated shingles	Fire-treated wood shingles	Clay/concrete tile; metal panels	Slate
Skylights	Small-size fixed plastic domes	Small-size operable plastic domes	Large-size fixed plastic domes	Operable clad-wood roof windows	Custom operable steel/glass units
Subtotal	0	3	2	2	0

Ground-floor construction

A slab floor on a flat site is the least expensive floor you can build, followed by a crawlspace foundation with wood framing. Full-height basements cost more, but the resulting usable space can far outweigh the extra expense. In colder parts of the country, where footings are deep to avoid freezing, basements make even more sense.

Exterior-wall construction

The cost of building straight, 8-ft.-tall wood-frame walls is the baseline against which other wall framing is measured. Recently, the production-housing industry has started building more homes with taller ceilings. Labor costs are similar, but materials cost more. As variations in wall height increase, fewer walls can be built using standardized assembly steps, thus lowering framing efficiency. Curved walls are more complicated and pricey.

Exterior-wall finish

The least expensive wall finish does double duty as sheathing and finished surface. Material choices are limited to plywood and similar panel products that are rated for exposure to the elements. When the sheathing and the finish are separate elements, such as plywood covered by shingles or lap siding, wall cost increases. Brick and stone finishes are among the most costly to install because material and delivery costs are high and because installation must be done carefully by experienced masons.

Exterior doors

The least expensive doors are sliding glass in a standard aluminum finish, and primed or prefinished wood/plywood hinged doors. As the construction quality, finish level, amount of glass, and design intricacy increase, cost rises. Exterior doors are available individually or as part of a complete prehung-door assembly that includes the surrounding frame, threshold, and weatherstripping. While the cost of one of these assemblies is more than that of a single door, it may be less than the cost of fitting a door to its opening on site.

Windows

Window frames and sashes commonly are made of (from least to most expensive) aluminum, vinyl, fiberglass, steel, wood, or clad wood (wood covered with aluminum or vinyl on the exterior). Sliding windows are the simplest. Casement and awning windows are more expensive, and dual-operation windows, which open like either a casement window or an awning window, tend to be the most expensive. In most climates, insulated glass with multiple glazing is worth the extra expense and may be required by code.

Roof shape and construction

The shape of a house partly influences its roof form. Rectangles or squares can be covered easily with flat or simple gable roofs. They require a minimum amount of structural material, and there are no complicated roof intersections to weatherproof. As a home's floor plan becomes more complex, such as with the addition of wings and courtyards, it may be appropriate to use hip roofs, or combinations of flat, gable, and shed-roof shapes. These complicated roof configurations require more complex assemblies and weatherproofing.

Roofing material

Asphalt shingles and asphalt-impregnated felt sheets laminated together with hot tar (a built-up roof) are the least expensive roofing materials. If the roof is a prominent part of a home's appearance, it may be desirable to emphasize the texture and shape of the roof with more refined materials, such as wood or slate shingles or clay or concrete tiles. They are, however, heavier materials that often require additional structural support. The higher installation costs of these materials may be justified because of their increased longevity.

Skylights

The least expensive skylights are aluminum-framed, plastic-domed units in rectangular shapes up to 2 ft. by 8 ft., and in squares up to 4 ft. on a side. Larger sizes—up to 8 ft. sq.—are also standard for many manufacturers, but costs generally increase as side dimensions exceed 4 ft. Vented and operable skylights cost somewhat more. Clad-wood and steel-frame glass skylights are also available in standard sizes, usually in 8-in. increments, at a higher cost.