

The Complete Guide to Gutter Protection



This guide is designed to give you a brief overview of gutter protection to assist you in the decision making process. With so many different options available, it is impossible to give you detailed information on each one; however, we're hopeful that this general information will clear up any questions or misconceptions you may have about specific types of gutter protection. When making your decision, consider the reputation of the manufacturer, the quality and reliability of the product's performance, the product's warranty and whether the product has been independently tested and endorsed. Gutter protection should keep your loved ones from risking life and limb as they attempt to clean out clogged gutters and as a result, reduce the risk of potential damage to your home.

Understanding your gutters.

Before we start talking about gutter protection, let's briefly discuss your gutters. Conventional gutters are attached to your home's fascia boards, otherwise known as gutter boards. Gutters generally come in 4", 5" or 6" widths (measured at the top of the gutter) and are classified as box, half-round or K-style (also known as ogee) gutters. Most homes in the U.S. have K-style (ogee) gutters and are either 5 or 6 inch widths. Gutters are generally attached to the home in one of three ways: straps, hangers or spikes and ferrules. Your gutters should have a 1/4" slope for every 10 feet of gutter run so they drain properly. Unless you are building a new home,



K-style Gutter

your gutters are already in place but it is important to consider a company that can identify any problems with your existing gutters such as lack of proper slope, gutters that are not securely fastened to the fascia board or miters (corners) and end caps that are not properly sealed. Otherwise, some gutter protection systems may not work properly. Gutters without any type of gutter protection should be cleaned at least twice a year, especially if there are a lot of trees growing near your home.

What is a gutter protection system?

Simply put, a gutter protection system is designed to protect your gutters and allow rain water to enter your gutter while keeping leaves and other debris out of your gutter.

Why is this important?

Leaves and debris can clog your gutters and downspouts. Should this happen, the water could fill up the gutter and spill over the front and pool around your foundation, causing damage to your landscaping and home, including mold and peeling paint.



Why consider a gutter protection system?

There are a number of reasons to consider a gutter protection system. The most important is the safety of your loved ones. Each year, over 175 thousand people fall from ladders and around 350 of those falls are fatal. Often times those falls occur while someone is on a ladder cleaning debris from a gutter. And as we mentioned before, clogged gutters can cause thousands of dollars in damages to your home from rotting fascia boards, landscape erosion and foundation repair, not to mention the convenience of not having to clean your gutters, giving you extra free time to do the things you like to do. And finally, a quality gutter protection system can add value to your home, making your home more desirable when it comes time to sell.

What are the different types of gutter protection?

There are probably more types of gutter protection systems than types of gutters! But basically, there are six types of systems:

- **Screens** - Screens are exactly what the name implies; a screen that installs over the gutter.
- **Bracket systems** - Bracket systems are gutter guards that use brackets that attach to your gutter and hold the gutter protection product in place.
- **One piece systems** - These systems combine the gutter and the gutter protection together into one piece.
- **“In the gutter” systems** - “In the gutter” systems are things that will lay in your gutters such as a piece of foam or a brush, which serve as a type of filter.
- **Hooded products**, also known as surface tensions products - Hooded (or domed) systems attach to the lip of the gutter and go underneath the shingles and are called “hooded” because just as the hood of your car covers the engine, these products cover the gutter.
- **Dispersal systems** - Dispersal systems are products that use no downspouts. In fact they use no gutters! The product is attached to the fascia and when the water comes off the roof, it hits the panel below and runs through a set of baffles or louvers at the bottom and is dispersed in a pattern onto the ground below.

With all these different types of systems, how do I know which one is right for my home? Or better yet, which kind works?

As is the case with anything, there are good and bad points to each. First, to determine which one is right for your home, there are a number of things to consider. What kind of trees are around your home - how much of an investment do you want to make, realizing that in most cases, you get what you pay for - what's the reputation of both the product and the company that makes the product. The design of the product is also crucial as it directly effects the strength and performance of the gutter system. So, which kind works? Well to be truthful, they ALL work. It's just a case of how well they work and how long they will last before they clog. Let's take a look at each.



Screens:

This was basically the first type of gutter protection. The very first ones simply laid on top of the gutter. The later versions use clips to attach to the lip of the gutter. They come in steel, aluminum, plastic and vinyl. The upside to screens are both the cost and the installation. They are relatively inexpensive and fairly easy to install, but offer few color choices. The downside however, is that since they are connected to the gutter using clips, they can easily blow off in strong winds. They also can bend fairly easily when snow and ice buildup on top of them. They can easily collect debris, require routine maintenance, have a very limited warranty, if any, and provide no stability to the gutter system. Very few have an overlap installation, which means when two pieces of the product come together, they can separate and allow debris to enter the gutter. Although they will reduce the frequency of gutter cleaning, they will not eliminate it.

Bracket Systems:

These systems get their name from the way the product is attached to the gutter using support brackets. Usually these type systems are more durable than screens, offer a wider selection of colors to choose from and are a little more expensive. However, these types of products are susceptible to coming loose in strong winds and fail to offer any added support to existing gutter system. These products also may fail to install or work properly on low or no pitch roofs. Finally, bracket spacing is crucial. Brackets should be placed a minimum of 24 inches apart.



One piece systems:

These systems combine the gutter and gutter protection into one solid piece and are generally used when you need to replace your entire gutter system. They are often suggested for areas where there is heavy rainfalls. A myth is that these type systems are better in heavy rainfall areas because they can handle higher amounts of rain water. That is just not true. One piece systems handle no more rainwater than a hooded system. Compare the independent testing. They do offer a wide variety of colors and are much more durable than screens. They also offer a limited warranty. Because you are replacing your gutters as well, they can be quite expensive and if any repair is needed, the complete gutter will need to be replaced. They often times require multiple downspouts, which could be located in awkward locations. They mount to the fascia as was described in the opening paragraph, so they don't add stability to the gutter system. They also have a smaller area for the surface tension to work.



“In the gutter” systems:

These types of gutter protection are products that are laid in the gutter and are supposed to work as a sort of filter. They are made out of several types of material including a foam type product, nylon, plastic or even a big brush that lays in the gutter. They are generally inexpensive and popular with the “Do It Yourself” crowd because of the ease of installation. They also have a low profile so they won't detract from your home's curb appeal. However, they don't add any stability to your gutter system and may require periodic cleaning; otherwise, mold may buildup over time. And let's compare the brush in the gutter with a woman's hair brush. Over time, it needs to be cleaned as the hair becomes entangled in the bristles. Leaves and debris can get caught in the bristles and will need to be removed. Some of the products can become hard and brittle over prolonged exposure to the elements and will need to be replaced within 5 to 10 years. And to be honest, you really can't call them gutter protection because they actually do not protect your gutters.

Dispersal System:

This is a system that actually replaces your conventional gutters. The water comes off the roof and falls onto a panel that has angled louvers. The water then flows through those louvers and disperses in a pattern onto the ground below. The panels are attached to the fascia (or gutter) board and may need to be extended outward if a steep roof valley causes a large amount of water to shoot off the roof. These generally are available in limited colors and can be spray painted by the homeowner if desired. Because of the product design, as snow or icicles, which formed at the bottom of the louvers during freezing temperatures begin to thaw, dripping can occur under the product. Even though the rain is dispersed in a pattern below the panels, a heavy rain could cause ponding around the foundation, which could in turn, cause water to leak into the basement.



Why is adding stability to the gutter important?

As was mentioned earlier, gutters are attached to the fascia or gutter boards. Gutters are designed to handle rain water, which drains to the downspout. They are not secured to your home with the intent of bearing a heavy weight, such as when the gutters fill with ice or snow. That weight can cause the gutters to pull away from the fascia, allowing moisture to cause the gutter boards to rot and deteriorate. Any system that only attaches to the top of the gutter does not strengthen the gutter system. It merely adds to the weight that the gutter must support.

How do you add strength to the gutter system?

When you attach a gutter protection system to the roof and the gutter, you are using that system to tie the gutter to the roof and thereby adding strength and stability to the gutters.

But won't putting nails or screws in the roof, damage the roof or void the shingle or roof warranty?

Some would like you to believe that and to be honest, that may be true - IF, and that's the key word, if the gutter protection product is installed incorrectly. However, if the product is installed using deck screws and then sealed properly with a waterproof approved sealant, the roof will not leak and the shingle warranty will not be affected. ([Click here to see the letters from leading shingle manufacturers](#)).

How important is the thickness of the material?

Common sense says that the thicker the material, the stronger and more durable it will be. However, the thicker the material, the more expensive it will be as well. What is most important is the material thickness of your gutter, rather than the thickness of the gutter protection. As a general rule of thumb, most American homes have gutters made out of .027 inch aluminum. To compliment the strength of your gutter system, you should not use a gutter protection any thinner than .019.

What are the differences in the gutter protection material?

Again, the better the material, the more costly it will be. Gutter protection will basically come in 4 different types of material: steel, aluminum, vinyl and copper. Galvanized steel is fairly economical; however, steel will rust, which could cause problems in the future. Aluminum products will be a little more expensive but will never rust, which makes them a good investment. Vinyl will be the least expensive and will not rust but isn't as strong as aluminum and can become brittle and crack in extreme cold conditions and/or with age. Finally the most expensive will be the copper as it will last the longest and be the most durable.

Are end caps important and what do they do?

End caps are not only important, they are crucial. Not installing an end cap on your gutter protection would be akin to not installing an end cap on your gutters. End caps are the pieces at the end of the gutter which encapsulate the gutter trough keeping the water from spilling out the ends. Both gutter and gutter protection end caps are important as they keep out any animals from entering the gutters and building nests, which would most certainly lead to your gutters becoming clogged. An additional important factor to consider is whether the end caps fit securely without any openings. Even the smallest opening can be a doorway for animals to build their home in your gutters.

What about the gutter guard reviews I see on the internet?


For the most part, they can be helpful in a general sort of way. However, often times gutter protection manufacturers must pay a fee for the review, which means it's an advertisement for all intensive purposes. To determine the true value of a gutter guard, the product should be independently tested by a reputable and certified testing facility. That way the results are neither favorable nor unfavorable based on a fee, relationship or any other criteria.


Why is having a product independently tested all that important?


The term "Independently" tested means the company that was hired to test the product is independent from the manufacturer and will not be swayed to skew the results in any way. The product "is what it is" and the testing facility is completely unbiased and simply reports the results of the testing. Products should be tested to determine how much rain the product can handle, how much debris does the product allow to enter the gutter, how much weight the product will withstand and recover from, and most importantly, will strong winds cause the product to separate from the gutter or worse yet, blow completely off!


What are the questions you should ask the contractor?


No pun intended but that's a good question! Let's look at some of the major concerns a homeowner should have when considering doing business with a gutter protection company.


-  **Reputation**


One of the most important things you need to know about your contractor is their reputation. How long have they been in business? In most cases, you don't stay in business very long if you sell inferior products or have shoddy workmanship. You can also easily gain a lot of valuable information contacting your area Better Business Bureau.
-  **Roof, Gutter, Insulation & Ventilation Knowledge**

Is the contractor qualified to determine if your gutter system is working properly or if you have any problems with your roof? For example, improper and/or insufficient insulation and ventilation can cause a number of roof problems, regardless of whether it's Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall. These problems can cause any gutter protection to work ineffectively.
-  **Trained Installers**

Another important question to have answered is whether the installers have been certified or received any factory authorized training. A quality product is only as good as its installation.
-  **Product Information**

You also need to gather as much information on the product you are considering purchasing. Does it have a lifetime, transferable warranty? Is it backed by Good Housekeeping, which offers a limited 2-year replacement or refund warranty, on top of the product's warranty.
-  **Product Choices**

How many products does the contractor offer? Would you go to a car dealership that offers only one model of car? You need the proper product for your home and often times the one product the contractor offers is not the best product for your home or budget.
-  **Sub-Contractors?**

The quality of the workmanship is obviously a very important factor in determining what product you purchase. That's why it's important to make sure if the contractor uses sub-contractors, they have been properly trained by the manufacturer.
-  **Are You Protected?**

Always ask your contractor to produce a valid certificate of liability insurance and workers' comp coverage. Without this protection, you and/or your homeowner's policy may be at risk.



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