

OUTDOOR SPACE PLANNING CHECKLIST

Screened Porches · Decks · Outdoor Kitchens

Whether you're just starting to explore the possibilities or you're ready to get quotes tomorrow, this checklist is built for you. It walks you through the key planning decisions for screened porches, decks, and outdoor kitchens — so whether you're gathering ideas or comparing contractors, you know exactly what questions to ask.

Design Builders has been building premium outdoor living spaces in Maryland and Northern Virginia since 2006. No two projects are alike — and no two quotes should be either. Use this guide to make sure yours are.

How to use this checklist: Work through each section relevant to your project. Check off items you've already decided, and use the blank lines to jot notes. Bring this with you to every consultation — including ours.

■ SECTION 1: Screened Porch Planning

For homeowners ready to get quotes. Work through these decisions before your first contractor meeting.

SIZE & LAYOUT

- Approximate square footage decided (or range)
Common sizes: 12x16, 16x20, 20x16. Larger than you think — furniture adds up.
- Attachment style determined: attached to house vs. free-standing
- Roof style selected: gable, hip, shed, or cathedral
Gable is most common; cathedral opens up the ceiling dramatically.
- Ceiling height preference noted
- Door placement and count decided (screen door, storm door, double entry)

FLOORING

- Composite decking selected (Trex, TimberTech/AZEK, Zuri, Fiberon)
Trex Transcend and AZEK are top performers in the MD/VA climate.
- Flooring color and grain pattern chosen
- Flagstone or porcelain paver floor considered as alternative
- IPE or other hardwood option evaluated

SCREENING SYSTEM

- Screening system type selected: Screenshot, EZE Breeze, Sunspace Windows, retractable
Screenshot = fixed fiberglass screens. Sunspace = vinyl windows that open/close for 4-season use.
- Screen mesh type and color chosen (charcoal is most popular for views)
- Motorized retractable screens considered for dual open/screened use
Phantom screens let your porch convert between open deck and screened room.
- Screen door type decided: standard Larson, sliding, or double door

CEILING & STRUCTURE

- Ceiling material selected: beadboard vinyl, knotty cedar, tongue-and-groove, drywall
- Ceiling fan location(s) planned
At least one fan per 200 sq ft. Position over seating, not over dining table.
- Skylights considered
- Foundation type decided: helical piers vs. concrete footings
Helical piers (PierTech) install faster, require no digging, and perform better in MD/VA soil.
- Structural framing material: pressure treated wood vs. Fortress steel framing
Steel framing is stronger and won't warp, shrink, or rot.

COMFORT & TECHNOLOGY

- Infrared heater brand/type selected: Infratech, Bromic
Infratech and Bromic are the gold standard. Plan 1 heater per ~100 sq ft in MD winters.
- Electrical plan mapped: outlets, lighting circuits, TV rough-in
- Exterior lighting type chosen: recessed, pendant, string lights, step lighting
- Outdoor TV mounting location decided
- Ceiling fan wiring included in electrical plan

PERMITS & PRACTICAL

- HOA approval obtained (if applicable)
- Local permit requirements researched for your county
Montgomery County and Fairfax County have different setback and height rules.
- Setback requirements from property lines confirmed
- Contractor license, bond, and insurance verified
- Warranty terms on materials and labor reviewed

Design Builders Pro Tip: Ask every contractor to spec the same footprint and screening system so you can compare quotes side-by-side. The biggest price differences usually come from foundation type and screen system choice — not labor.

■ SECTION 2: Deck Planning

From single-level to multi-story, these are the decisions that shape every deck quote.

DESIGN & CONFIGURATION

- Number of levels determined: single, split, or multi-level
- Approximate total square footage estimated per level
- Connection to house: attached or free-standing
- Built-in bench seating or planters planned
- Steps/stair design decided: single run, L-shaped, wraparound
Wide stairs (4+ feet) make a dramatic design statement and improve flow.
- Access from inside the house reviewed: existing door location, new door needed

DECKING MATERIAL

- Decking brand selected: Trex, TimberTech/AZEK, Zuri, Fiberon
Trex Transcend and AZEK PVC are the dominant low-maintenance choices in MD/VA.
- Product line and color chosen
Colors matter — lighter tones show less dirt; darker tones absorb more heat.
- Fastener type: face screw, hidden fastener, or Trex Hideaway system
Hidden fasteners create a cleaner look and protect the board edges.
- Board direction decided: parallel to house, diagonal, or picture frame border

RAILING SYSTEM

- Railing material selected: composite, aluminum, glass, stainless cable, vinyl
Glass and cable railings maximize views. Trex Transcend composite is low-maintenance.
- Post style and color chosen to match or contrast decking
- Top rail material decided (composite cap rail, aluminum top rail)
- Baluster style: traditional, steel cable, glass panel, or open rail
- Lighting integrated into railing posts or top cap

STRUCTURE & FOUNDATION

- Foundation type decided: helical piers vs. concrete footings
Helical piers are faster, cleaner, and engineered to your soil — no waiting for concrete to cure.
- Framing material: pressure treated lumber vs. Fortress steel framing
Steel framing eliminates rot and insect risk. Worth the upgrade for ground-level or wet areas.

Under-deck drainage system considered (for second-story decks)
An under-deck dry system turns the space below into usable covered patio area.

Ledger board attachment to house reviewed (critical structural connection)

OUTDOOR LIGHTING & ELECTRICAL

Post cap lights planned

Riser/stair lighting included in design
Trex Outdoor Lighting kits integrate cleanly with Trex decking systems.

Outlet locations mapped for grilling, string lights, speakers

Landscape and perimeter lighting considered

PERMITS & PRACTICAL

Permit requirements confirmed for your county and project size

HOA deck design guidelines reviewed

Neighboring property setback distances measured

Contractor experience with your specific decking brand verified
Ask if they're a Trex or TimberTech certified installer — it matters for warranty coverage.

Design Builders Pro Tip: When getting deck quotes, always specify the decking brand, product line, and color — otherwise contractors will substitute cheaper materials and quotes won't be comparable. Ask each contractor to confirm they are a certified installer for that brand.

■ SECTION 3: Outdoor Kitchen Planning

Outdoor kitchens are the most custom element of any outdoor project. These decisions drive the biggest cost variables — nail them down before you get a single quote.

LAYOUT & LOCATION

Kitchen location relative to house decided: adjacent to porch, on deck, standalone patio
Proximity to your indoor kitchen determines gas line and electrical run costs.

Basic layout configuration chosen: straight/linear, L-shaped, U-shaped, or island
L-shaped is the most versatile for Maryland/Virginia backyards.

Working triangle between grill, prep surface, and refrigerator considered

Traffic flow and sight lines to yard/guests planned

Coverage/shade situation addressed: under porch roof, pergola, or open sky

CABINETRY & STRUCTURE

Cabinet brand selected: Danver stainless steel, other
Danver Chromica stainless outdoor cabinets are the premium choice — fully weatherproof, no painting, no rusting.

Cabinet color and finish chosen
Danver offers powder-coated colors including Baltic, Graphite, and custom options.

Counter surface material decided: granite, porcelain, concrete, stainless
Granite and porcelain hold up best outdoors in MD/VA freeze-thaw cycles.

Number of base cabinets and drawer units determined

Cabinet door style (framed, frameless, drawer-only sections) decided

COOKING APPLIANCES

Primary grill brand and size selected: Blaze, Lynx, Coyote, Weber, Green Egg, other
Blaze is Design Builders' top recommendation — commercial quality, excellent warranty.

Grill type decided: gas built-in, charcoal, kamado (Green Egg/Big Joe), or pellet
Many clients pair a gas grill with a Green Egg smoker/kamado for versatility.

BTU output requirements understood for your cooking style

Side burner included in plan

Pizza oven or smoker box considered

Rotisserie kit compatibility verified with selected grill

APPLIANCES & AMENITIES

Outdoor refrigerator size and type decided (undercounter, full, beverage cooler)

Ice maker considered (undercounter built-in)

Outdoor sink planned; hot and cold water vs. cold only
Cold-only outdoor sinks are much simpler and adequate for most uses.

Outdoor dishwasher evaluated

Warming drawer or trash drawer included in layout

Outdoor TV size and mounting location decided

Outdoor-rated speaker system planned

UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Gas line type decided: natural gas (preferred) vs. propane
Natural gas is more convenient and cost-effective long-term. Requires running a line.

Gas line sizing confirmed for total BTU load of all appliances

Electrical circuits mapped: 20-amp for refrigerator, GFCI outlets, lighting

Water supply and drain lines planned (if including sink)

- Under-counter storage for propane tank if not on natural gas

FLOORING & SURROUNDINGS

- Kitchen flooring surface decided: porcelain pavers, flagstone, concrete, deck
Archatrak porcelain pavers are low-maintenance, non-slip, and handle heat extremely well.
- Patio or hardscape area surrounding kitchen planned
- Lighting type and placement above kitchen decided: pendants, recessed, task lighting
- Fire pit or fire feature integration nearby considered

Design Builders Pro Tip: Specify your grill and cabinet brands before getting quotes. Contractors who substitute lower-grade appliances without telling you is the #1 source of outdoor kitchen quote confusion. If you're considering Danver cabinets and a Blaze grill, say so explicitly in every conversation.

Ready to talk? Design Builders has been building premium outdoor spaces since 2006.

Montgomery County MD · Fairfax County VA · Surrounding areas

301-875-2781 · info@designbuildersmd.com · designbuildersmd.com

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