

Key Considerations for Roof Installation for Additions and ADUs

Adding square footage to a home or building an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) in the backyard is a big step. It changes how you use your property and often reshapes your daily life. But before the walls go up, before the windows are set, the roof deserves serious attention. In my years of working on projects across Austin and Travis County, I have seen too many homeowners pour energy into floor plans and finishes while treating the roof as an afterthought. That approach almost always leads to headaches later. Roof installation for additions and ADUs demands its own planning, its own material choices, and its own understanding of how a new roof ties into an existing structure.

Start with the Connection Point

Every addition or ADU that attaches to a main house creates a junction where two roof planes meet. That valley, or cricket, or simple abutment is the most vulnerable spot on the entire project. Water flows down the main roof and hits that new wall or roof section. If the flashing is not detailed correctly, if the underlayment does not extend far enough up the wall, or if the drip edge is misaligned, you will see stains on the ceiling inside within a year or two. In Austin's climate, where we get sudden downpours during spring and fall, that risk is real.

For detached ADUs, the connection point is less about tying into an existing roof and more about ensuring the standalone structure sheds water properly. But even there, the [roof installation for additions and ADUs](#) has to account for the fact that these buildings are often sited in tight spaces, near property lines, or under trees. That affects how you vent the attic, where you place the ridge vents, and what kind of soffit vents you can install.

Material Choices Matter More Than You Think

The roof of an addition or ADU does not have to match the main house exactly, but it should complement it. More importantly, it needs to perform under the same weather conditions. In Central Texas, that means heat, UV exposure, and occasional hail. Asphalt shingles remain a solid choice for many projects. They are affordable, widely available, and installers know how to work with them. But they are not the only option.

Metal roofing has gained popularity for ADUs, especially modern or minimalist designs. It sheds snow easily (not that we get much, but it does happen) and handles heavy rain well. The downsides include higher noise during storms and the need for careful expansion and contraction detailing. If you go with metal, make sure the installer uses proper underlayment and accounts for thermal movement at the eaves and ridges.

Tile roofing, whether clay or concrete, gives a timeless look that suits many Austin neighborhoods. It is heavy, so the structure must be framed to carry that load. In an addition, that often means reinforcing the existing foundation or designing the new foundation to handle the extra weight from the start. Tile also requires specialized flashings at valleys and hips. It is not a beginner-friendly material.

Then there is synthetic slate, which offers the appearance of natural slate without the weight or cost. I have used GAF Camelot and GAF Royal Sovereign on several projects, and they hold up well in this climate. Synthetic slate works especially well on ADUs where the owner wants a high-end look on a smaller footprint. The key is proper underlayment beneath it, because synthetic slate, like real slate, relies on a secondary water barrier to handle wind-driven rain.

Ventilation Is Not Optional

One mistake I see repeatedly is inadequate attic ventilation on additions and ADUs. Builders sometimes treat a small roof as if it does not need the same care as a full house. That is wrong. Without proper airflow, heat builds up under the roof deck in summer, baking the shingles from below and shortening their life. In winter, condensation forms on the underside of the OSB sheathing, leading to mold and rot.

A good roof installation for additions and ADUs includes both intake and exhaust vents. Soffit vents at the eaves pull cool air in. Ridge vents or a roof ridge vent at the peak let hot, moist air escape. The ratio matters: you need roughly one square foot of net free vent area for every 300 square feet of attic floor. That is a rule of thumb, but it works. If the addition has a complicated roofline with multiple valleys, you may need additional vents in those areas.

I also recommend using an ice and water shield product at the eaves and in valleys. Even in Texas, where ice dams are rare, that self-sealing membrane provides extra protection against water backing up under the shingles during a heavy rain. It is cheap insurance.

Structural Support and Decking

The roof deck, usually OSB sheathing or plywood, has to be thick enough to support the roofing material and any foot traffic during installation. For asphalt shingles, 7/16-inch OSB is standard. For tile or synthetic slate, you need at least 5/8-inch plywood or OSB, and the framing spacing may need to be tighter. Check the manufacturer's specifications before you start. GAF, for example, publishes clear guidelines for each of their products, including GAF Timberline HD, which is a high-end laminate shingle that requires specific underlayment and nailing patterns.

Modified bitumen roofs are less common on residential additions, but they appear on flat-roofed ADUs or garages with rooftop decks. That material requires a torch-down application or cold adhesive, and it needs a solid substrate, usually a layer of cover board over the insulation.

It is durable and walkable, but it demands an experienced crew. I have seen DIY attempts fail within a year because the seams were not sealed properly.

Practical Tips for the Planning Stage

- Order enough material to cover the ridge caps and valleys twice. Small roofs often waste a higher percentage of material due to cuts at hips and valleys.
- Make sure the drip edge extends at least 1/2 inch past the fascia to guide water clear of the wood. A short drip edge causes rot at the eaves over time.
- If the addition shares a wall with the main house, install a kick-out flashing at the bottom of the roof-to-wall intersection. That diverts water away from the wall surface.
- For detached ADUs, consider the prevailing wind direction when placing ridge vents. You want the vent oriented to capture airflow, not fight it.
- Talk to your roofer about the warranty. Many manufacturers, including GAF, offer enhanced warranties when their full system, from underlayment to ridge vent, is used together.

Working with an Existing Roof

When you add a new roof section to an existing house, the old roof often needs to be opened up at the connection point. That means removing shingles, cutting back the sheathing, and installing new flashing that ties into the old underlayment. It is messy work, and it exposes the interior to weather for a short time. Plan for that. Have tarps ready, and schedule the work during a dry spell if possible.

In Travis County, building codes require permits for most additions and ADUs. The roof assembly must meet the energy code for insulation values and air sealing. That usually means a certain thickness of rigid foam above the deck or between rafters, with a proper roof underlayment over it. Your roofer should be familiar with these requirements. If they are not, find someone who is.

Why Experience Counts

Roof installation for additions and ADUs is not the same as roofing a new house from scratch. It involves transitions, tighter spaces, and often a mix of old and new materials. An experienced crew knows how to flash a valley against a brick wall, how to cut synthetic slate around a skylight, and how to set the ridge vent so it aligns with the existing roof's ridge line. They also know that asphalt shingles expand in the heat and contract at night, and they leave the proper gaps at the edges to accommodate that movement.

I have worked on projects where the homeowner saved a few hundred dollars by hiring a general handyman to roof a small ADU. Those savings evaporated when the roof leaked during the first big storm, damaging the interior walls and flooring. The repair cost more than the original roof would have. It is not worth the gamble.

Final Thoughts

The best approach is to treat the roof as a system, not a single layer. From the OSB sheathing up through the underlayment, the drip edge, the ice and water shield at the vulnerable spots, the soffit vents, and the ridge vent, every component plays a role. Choosing materials like GAF Timberline HD or GAF Royal Sovereign for their durability, and pairing them with the right underlayment, gives you a roof that will last decades. In Austin's climate, that matters.

Whether you are adding a bedroom, a home office, or a rental unit, the roof is what keeps everything inside dry and comfortable. Give it the attention it deserves during planning, and the roof installation for additions and ADUs will go smoothly. Cut corners, and you will pay for it later, both in money and in hassle.