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How Much Does it Cost to Install a Pool Now That Everyone Wants One?

by Melissa Rudy
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When you visualize the perfect backyard oasis, an inground pool is almost always part of the picture. Along with fun, refreshment, and recreation, swimming pools add an element of luxury to any outdoor space.

According to early 2020 statistics from Swim University, there are approximately 10.6 million swimming pools in the U.S., more than half of which are inground. And that number seems to be rising: In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, pool sales have been making a splash as homebound families look to create their own summer sanctuaries.

Tami Pardee, a top real estate agent in California (the state with the most swimming pools in the country), has seen an even higher demand for pools, spas, and hot tubs in 2020.

That trend is echoed by the professionals putting in the pools: Nearly 45% of the members of the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance expect to see their revenues increase by at least 10% this year. Some pool contractors have as many as 40 to 85 pool builds scheduled out. And HomeLight's research shows that private pools are rising the ranks on homebuyers' wish lists.

If you're considering investing in a pool, you need to crunch the numbers first — particularly if there's any chance that you might be selling anytime soon. We talked with a top California real estate agent, contacted several pool contractors, and researched cost estimates from multiple reputable online sources to help you navigate the budgeting process.

Source: (oneSHUTTER oneMEMORY / Shutterstock)

What's the estimated cost for an inground pool?

Just as no two houses are identical in cost, every pool comes with its own unique price tag. The total expense varies widely based on area, chosen materials, and any added features. The average cost to put in an inground swimming pool in the U.S. ranges from $28,000-$55,000 — but pricey bells and whistles can easily push the number over that top range.

According to our survey of over 1,100 top real estate agents nationwide in Q3 2020, the **average cost to install an inground pool is $42,480**. Homeowners can expect to recoup $21,483 of that cost at resale, provided the pool is in good condition, for a 51% ROI.

However, it's unlikely that a pool under $50,000 will be upscale, especially if you're in a more expensive market. For example, Pardee breaks down the average pool prices in her Los Angeles market:

- Low-end: $45,000-$50,0000
- Middle-tier: $75,000-$100,000
- Upscale: $150,000+

Aquamarine Pool Company in Cincinnati, Ohio offers estimates in those same ranges:

- Basic pool with lights and minimal concrete, medium-sized (14' x 30'):

$45,000

- Upscale pool with water features, tanning ledge, heater (larger pool): $70,000-$90,000
- Upper-end pool with landscaping, walls, etc.: $125,000 and up

Finally, Cristina Miguelez, remodeling specialist at Fixr.com, puts the average cost at around $50,000, but she echoes the range of $37,000 (for a low-end, basic pool with vinyl liner) all the way up to $100,000 and beyond for a high-end pool with major upgrades.

How does size impact the cost of a pool?

When it comes to budgeting for a pool, size makes a big difference. Pools are sold and priced by the square foot, and Aquamarine Pools estimates that the dimensions drive about 75% of the overall price.

Miguelez says the average size of a backyard swimming pool is 12’ x 24’, but they can be made in virtually any size. According to Pool Pricer, some other common dimensions are:

- 10’ x 20’
- 15’ x 30’
- 20’ x 40’.

When selecting a pool size, ask yourself the following questions:

- **How will you use the pool?** If you plan to use it for swimming laps and other exercise, you’ll want a longer pool. But if it’s primarily intended for sunbathing and quick dips to cool off, you can probably get away with a smaller size. If you’ll be adding a diving board, the pool will need to have a deep end of at least eight feet.
- **Who will be using the pool?** If it’s for adult use only, you can probably opt for an overall deeper pool, but if a mix of children and adults will be swimming, you may need to incorporate a shallow end and zero-entry (beach-entry) access. If you have a larger family or plan to entertain guests, you should plan for more swimming space.
- **How much space is available?** Ultimately, the potential size of your pool will hinge on the size and suitability of your backyard. Make sure there is enough room to accommodate not only the pool itself, but also the surrounding deck, patio, and landscaping.

Source: (Photographee.eu / Shutterstock)

Does shape impact cost?

The standard shapes for backyard swimming pools are rectangular, round, and oval. Rectangular pools are typically the least expensive because of their straight angles. Curved shapes — freeform, kidney, or custom — tend to be more challenging (thus more expensive) due to their irregular angles. According to some estimates, the cost for a kidney-shaped inground pool insert is around $2,000 more than a standard rectangle.

Also keep in mind that your selected pool material will determine which shapes are available. If you’re set on an unconventional shape, you may need to go with concrete, for example, as it offers more customization than the more budget-friendly fiberglass.

How do pool materials impact cost?

According to Miguelez, the three most common types of materials used to construct inground swimming pools include:

Vinyl (around $37,000)

This is the lowest-cost material, and also the fastest and easiest to make. Vinyl pools can be made into many different shapes, but the material also requires the most maintenance, as the liner will need to be replaced every seven years on average. "Vinyl is also the least likely to enhance your property or provide a good return on investment," Miguelez adds.

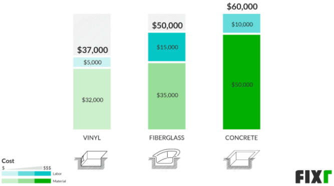
Fiberglass (around $50,000)

As a mid-range material, fiberglass is quick to install and also highly durable. The shell of a fiberglass insert can last up to 25 years, and the material is easy to maintain and resistant to algae. However, the sizes and shapes are more limited because the fiberglass must be made into a mold, and each manufacturer has a set number of molds they can pour.

Concrete ($50,000-$60,000+)

The cost of a concrete pool will vary depending on whether you use gunite, shotcrete, or another method. Most are finished with plaster or an alternate material. Pardee sees a lot of L.A. homeowners using Pebble Tec, a high-end aggregate pool finish. A concrete pool takes the longest to build, usually up to 12 weeks.

The extra time and cost comes with its advantage: Concrete pools are the longest-lasting and most durable, and allow the most flexibility in size, shape, depth, and appearance. "There are virtually no limits to a concrete pool," says Miguelez. "They can be designed in standard shapes and freeform designs, as well as custom shapes."



Source: (Fixr)

Chlorine vs. salt water: What's the price difference?

Some backyard swimming pools use chlorine to kill the germs and bacteria that can cause viruses. In traditional chlorinated pools, you'd add the chlorine to the water using tablets or sticks. With saltwater pools, a generator uses a process called electrolysis to automatically produce the right amount of chlorine to keep the water safe and clean.

According to Miguelez from Fixr, there isn't a substantial cost difference between building a chlorine versus a saltwater pool. Saltwater pools do require a saltwater generator, which costs anywhere from $400 to $1,800 to purchase and around $300 to $500 to install. The salt itself only runs around $50 to $125, which means the total initial investment is somewhere between $750 and $2,425 — not a large amount relative to the total cost of the pool.

In terms of ongoing costs, saltwater pools usually have fewer chemical expenses, averaging around $70-$100 a year, while chlorine pools have chemical costs of about $300-$800 per year. That means it would take only around three years to recoup the extra costs of setting up a saltwater pool.

Source: (Dimitri Houtteman / Unsplash)

Extra costs to consider

The main reason there is such a wide variation in pool costs is because there are so many extra expenses aside from the pool itself. When creating your budget, be sure to take these essentials into account:

Yard prep

Not every backyard is pool-ready. If your lawn has big drops or rises that require leveling or the construction of walls, the costs can be as high as $7,500 to $12,000. If you're unsure whether your yard can accommodate a pool, or how much time and expense will be required to prep for excavation, speak with a pool builder to get their professional opinion.

Pool decking

The pool decking (also called the pool patio) is the area surrounding the pool itself. Most pool owners use this space for sunbathing, relaxing, and entertaining. It's important that the deck has enough room for any furniture you want to use around the pool, such as lounge chairs, tables, umbrellas, and a grill or outdoor kitchen. It should also be a safe, non-slip material.

The average pool deck size ranges from 600 to 700 square feet. Aquamarine Pools breaks down the approximate costs for the common types of decking materials:

- Basic concrete: $10 per square foot
- Colored concrete: $11.50 per square foot
- Stamped concrete: $16 per square foot
- Travertine/natural stone: $24 per square feet

Miguelez estimates that the pool deck can start at around $2,000 and go all the way up to $10,000 or higher, depending on size, design, and materials.

Pool cover

A quality cover is a must for any pool. Not only does it protect your pool from the elements when it's not in use, it also helps to prevent accidental drowning, reduces water evaporation, keeps debris out of the water, and retains heat to cut down on energy costs.

You may be able to find a cover in the $100 range, but some of the better-quality versions, including automatic covers, can be as expensive as $2,000. HomeAdvisor estimates a cost range of $600-$2,200.

Safety barriers

Many states and communities require that pool owners construct safety barriers (fences or walls) around residential swimming pools to prevent accidental drownings. Fences or walls should generally be at least four feet high, but preferably five feet or higher.

Installing a pool fence can cost anywhere from $1,500 to $10,000+, assuming an average of $15 to $25 per linear foot. The two biggest cost drivers are material and size.

Chain-link or mesh fencing are the most budget-friendly options at $1,000-$5,000. For higher-end materials like wrought iron, wood, aluminum, or vinyl, the price can be twice as much, ranging from $2,000 to $12,000. According to HomeAdvisor, the cost for screens and enclosures can range from $4,800-$14,300.

Hot tub combo

To enhance the "outdoor oasis" experience, some homeowners opt to include a hot tub in combination with a swimming pool. Aquamarine estimates an additional $14,000 cost for this feature. HomeAdvisor provides a range of $8,000-$15,000 to add a hot tub.

Heater

If you plan to use the pool early or late in the season, or if you just enjoy a consistently warmer water temperature, you might want to invest in a pool heater. You can expect to spend anywhere from $1,600-$3,800 for this add-on.

Waterfall

To add an element of tropical luxury to your backyard pool, you might consider adding a waterfall or other type of water feature. The cost will vary widely depending on the size and style you choose: Aquamarine estimates an average expense of $3,500, while HomeAdvisor estimates a range of $1,500-$10,000.

Diving Board

To install a diving board, you can expect to spend anywhere from $300 to over

$1,000. Of course, if you want this feature, you'll need to plan for a deep end of at least eight feet, which could affect the overall price of your pool.

Slide

If you expect to be entertaining children (or the young at heart) at your pool, the addition of a slide can elevate the fun factor. Prices will depend on the size and design, ranging from a simple, prefabricated slide for between $1,000-$4,000 all the way up to $10,000 or $20,000 for a larger, more complex slide.

Landscaping

Most pools require some degree of landscaping. On the low end, this can include adding trees, shrubs and plants around the pool, which HomeGuide says will cost anywhere from $3,000-$5,000, or $4 to $12 per square foot.

Some installations require more extensive (and expensive) landscaping to prep the backyard, such as a drainage system (about $3,400), a retaining wall (~$5,000), or tree removal (~$825).

Ongoing monthly costs

When budgeting for a pool, it's important to take into account the cost of long-term monthly maintenance. For example, Pardee notes that heating a pool can cost anywhere from $250-$1,000 per month. And if you plan to hire a service to help with regular cleanings and upkeep, that will add to the monthly expense.

Involving your real estate agent in the pool building process

If you're interested in putting in a swimming pool and there's a possibility that you may sell your home down the road, it's a good idea to chat with a real estate agent before starting the process. He or she can identify the latest trends and give you an idea of what buyers are looking for in a pool, so you can choose the features and designs that will make the outdoor space a strong selling point.

Header Image Source: (Luis Viegas / Shutterstock)

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