



What to Consider when Buying a Playset for your Backyard.

Choosing children's outdoor playsets, as they are now called, for the back yard is big decision. You want something lasting, affordable, safe and fun that will grow with your kids. Here are some of the things to consider when you're buying playsets for backyard use:

Materials

Wood, plastic and metal are the typical materials used for outdoor playsets. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

- **Wood** is known as the sturdiest and longest-lasting material for kids' outdoor playsets. But all woods are not equal. Pine is the least expensive, but it is the softest wood and doesn't last as long. Pine tends to wear from the inside out, so you may not know when a piece is worn through until it collapses - not the safest bet. Waterproofed, pressure-treated lumber is the best choice for wood playsets, but be sure to find out what was used in the pressure treating process. Avoid arsenic and chromium pressure treating, as these can be hazardous to children's health. Wood playsets are the most expensive choice. You may also find that some wood playsets attract bees, who like to bore holes in the frame and build hives inside. Spraying at the start of the season may be necessary.
- **Plastic** is the least sturdy and least expensive material. Many plastic playsets are designed for younger children and may not hold the weight of larger children and teens. Plastic is lighter than wood or metal, making it more prone to cracking or tipping over. If you only plan to use the playset for a few years with younger children, and your budget is limited, plastic may be a good choice.
- **Metal** playsets were the standard in the 1970s and 1980s but are less common now. They are less sturdy and less expensive than wood. Metal chains, hooks and bolts should be encased in rubber to prevent pinching or cuts from sharp edges. After a few years, metal playsets may rust, but you can control this by keeping an eye out for worn or chipped paint and touching it up periodically.

Playset Design

Consider the ages of your children when you buy an outdoor playset. If you have very young children, opt for a smaller set that they can use easily. Older children will need bigger equipment with plenty of climbing, hanging and swinging attachments.

Your kids will get bigger, so think about the future when you buy a playset. Consider getting a playset that can be added onto so that it will grow with your children and keep their interest for many years to come.

Upkeep/Maintenance

You'll have to maintain your playset for safety and longevity. It's a good idea to find out how much maintenance the playset will need and whether or not it has a warranty. Wooden playsets may need to be sealed every few years.

Budget

If you are budget conscious, metal or plastic might be your best option. A cheap wood playset probably won't be made well. Save some of your budget for professional installation unless you're very handy around the home. An improperly installed playset can cause severe injuries, so this isn't the project to practice your carpentry skills.

The best and longest-lasting playsets are made from pressure-treated wood with brackets and plates made from metal and highly durable plastic. These playsets are a good investment if your budget allows, and they could even add value to your home.

Yard Space

The rule for safety is six feet of clear space on all sides of the playset. That means no trees, bushes, walls or other obstacles. The playset itself must be installed on level ground, and it's best for the ground to be level within the six-foot safety zone. Playsets need to be anchored in the ground. All of our playset kits include anchors.

Safety and Maintenance

We always see playsets installed onto grass with no additional protection. It's always a good practice to put a protective surfacing material under and around your playset.

Use rubber tire mulch, sand or wood chips under the playset as a protective surface. Be sure there are no exposed hooks, bolts, splinters, or hinges that could catch on hair and clothing or scratch skin.

Check the weight rating of playsets to make sure they're sturdy enough for your kids and the inevitable friends who'll also be using your playset. Each month or so during the spring, summer and fall, check that the nuts and fastenings are tight and examine ropes for fraying. Look for signs of rot, rust and chipped or peeling paint as well. Slides should be checked for gaps between the platform and the slide itself. Make sure the rungs of all ladders are intact and give anything a child might hang from a solid tug to check for strength.

If possible, avoid ropes altogether. Rubber covered chains are much better than rope, and do not pose a choking hazard or rope burn hazard.

There is a playset safety organization called "ASTM". ASTM develops and publishes a home playset specification which manufacturers should follow and meet. But be cautious, the ASTM regulation is a voluntary specification and not a requirement.

Contact the manufacturer and ask if they actually meet ASTM through testing. Some manufacturers may claim to meet, but may merely use the specifications as guidelines in their playset design.

Research, research, research

In today's internet world it's easy and fast to do your own research on purchasing a playset. But there is one very helpful publication that the Consumer Product Safety Commission offers.

Go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/324.pdf>

Consumer Product Safety Commission Residential Playset Safety Handbook.

Thank you for taking the time to read our playset buying guide. Return to the [Kids Creations](#) website here.