

OTTAWA CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Exterior Work

Siding, roofing, decks, and other work on the
outside of the home

8 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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What is the lifespan of different roofing materials?

Most roofing materials in Ottawa last between 15 and 50+ years, but Ottawa's harsh climate — with extreme freeze-thaw cycles, heavy snow loads, and ice damming — can significantly shorten that lifespan if the wrong material or installation method is chosen.

Here's a breakdown of the most common roofing materials and what you can realistically expect in Eastern Ontario:

Asphalt Shingles (15–30 years) are by far the most common roofing material in Ottawa. Standard 3-tab shingles last around 15–20 years, while architectural (laminate) shingles typically carry a 25–30 year lifespan. Premium "lifetime" shingles are rated for 30–50 years, though Ottawa's climate means real-world performance often falls on the shorter end of manufacturer estimates. Ice damming along eaves is a major culprit — proper attic insulation and ventilation are critical to maximizing shingle life here.

Metal Roofing (40–70 years) is increasingly popular in Ottawa, and for good reason. Standing seam steel or aluminum roofs handle snow shedding exceptionally well, resist freeze-thaw damage, and require minimal maintenance. The higher upfront cost (\$12,000–\$25,000+ for an average home) is offset by the dramatically longer lifespan and lower maintenance needs. Steel roofing is particularly well-suited to Ottawa's rural and semi-rural properties.

Cedar Shake and Wood Shingles (20–30 years) perform well aesthetically but require more maintenance in Ottawa's wet springs and cold winters. Without regular treatment and proper ventilation, they're prone to moss, rot, and splitting. Some Ottawa heritage neighbourhoods like the Glebe or Rockcliffe favour cedar for its traditional look, but expect higher maintenance costs.

Flat/Low-Slope Roofing — TPO, EPDM, or Modified Bitumen (15–25 years) is common on additions, garages, and commercial-style builds. Ottawa's snow loads are a real concern here — flat roofs need to be engineered for weight, and drains must be kept clear. EPDM rubber membranes are durable and handle temperature swings well, making them a solid choice locally.

Slate and Concrete Tile (50–100+ years) are premium options that can outlast the house itself. Natural slate is rare in Ottawa due to cost (\$25,000–\$50,000+) and the structural reinforcement required, but it's unmatched in longevity. Concrete tile is more affordable but heavier — your roof structure must be assessed before installation.

Ottawa-Specific Considerations

The Ontario Building Code requires a minimum ice and water shield membrane along the first two metres of eaves on sloped roofs — this is non-negotiable and protects against ice dam infiltration. Ottawa's frost line and significant

annual snowfall (averaging 235 cm) mean that roof pitch, ventilation, and insulation are just as important as the material itself. A poorly ventilated attic will cut years off any roofing system.

When to Call a Professional

A licensed roofing contractor should inspect your roof every 3–5 years, and after any major ice storm or wind event. If you're seeing granule loss in gutters, curling shingles, daylight in the attic, or water stains on ceilings, don't wait — small issues become expensive repairs quickly. Roofing work in Ottawa is best scheduled between **May and October**, as cold temperatures affect adhesive strips on shingles and make surfaces dangerously slippery.

Your next step is to have a roofing contractor assess your current roof's condition and remaining lifespan — many offer free inspections. Browse verified roofing professionals in the **Ottawa Construction Network directory** to find licensed, insured contractors serving your area.

Q2

Should I repair or replace my roof?

The answer depends on your roof's age, the extent of damage, and your long-term plans for the home — but as a general rule, if your asphalt shingle roof is over 20 years old or damage covers more than 30% of the surface, replacement is usually the smarter investment.

Roofing decisions come down to cost-effectiveness over time. A repair makes sense when damage is isolated — a handful of missing or cracked shingles, a small flashing leak around a chimney or vent, or minor granule loss in one area. These fixes typically run **\$300–\$800 in Ottawa** and can add several years of life to an otherwise healthy roof. However, if your roofer finds soft decking underneath, widespread granule loss, or multiple layers of shingles already on the home, you're patching over a deeper problem and spending money that won't pay off.

Replacement becomes the right call when repairs would cost more than 30–40% of a full replacement, or when the roof has simply reached the end of its service life. **Standard 3-tab asphalt shingles last 15–20 years in Ottawa's climate**, while architectural (laminated) shingles can last 25–30 years — but our harsh freeze-thaw cycles, ice damming, and heavy snow loads accelerate wear faster than in milder climates. If your roof is sagging, has multiple leak points, or shows daylight through the attic, replacement is no longer optional.

Ottawa-specific costs for a full roof replacement typically range from:

- **Low:** \$5,000–\$8,000 (smaller home, standard architectural shingles)
- **Mid:** \$9,000–\$14,000 (average 2-storey, quality shingles, proper ice & water shield)

- **High:** \$15,000–\$25,000+ (complex roofline, premium materials, steep pitch, large home)

Ontario Building Code requires a permit for full roof replacements in some cases, particularly if you're replacing the decking. The City of Ottawa recommends checking with Building Code Services at **613-580-2424** or **ottawa.ca/building** to confirm whether your project requires one. Always ensure your contractor carries WSIB coverage and liability insurance — you can verify WSIB clearance at **wsib.ca/clearances**.

Before making any decision, get a proper inspection. A reputable Ottawa roofer will inspect your shingles, flashing, decking, soffits, fascia, and attic ventilation — and give you an honest assessment. Be cautious of contractors who push replacement without showing you photos or walking you through the attic. Get **at least two or three quotes**, and ask each contractor to specify what's included: tear-off of old shingles, ice and water shield along eaves (mandatory in our climate), underlayment, and disposal fees.

Your next step is to book a roof inspection before the fall season hits — Ottawa roofers get very busy in September and October. Browse verified roofing contractors in our **Ottawa contractor directory** to find licensed professionals in your area.

Q3

How do I maintain my deck?

Proper deck maintenance involves regular cleaning, inspection, and protective treatments, with the specific approach depending on your deck material and Ottawa's harsh seasonal conditions.

Regular maintenance is essential for Ottawa decks due to our extreme weather swings - from -30°C winters with heavy snow loads to hot, humid summers with UV exposure. The freeze-thaw cycles are particularly damaging, causing wood to expand and contract repeatedly, which can lead to cracking, warping, and fastener loosening.

For wood decks, start with a thorough cleaning each spring using a deck cleaner or mild detergent solution. Power washing is effective but use low pressure (1,200-1,500 PSI) and keep the nozzle 12+ inches away to avoid damaging the wood grain. After cleaning and allowing 48 hours to dry completely, apply a quality deck stain or sealant - this is crucial in Ottawa's climate. Semi-transparent stains typically last 2-3 years, while solid stains may last 3-4 years. The best time for staining is late spring through early fall when temperatures are consistently above 10°C and no rain is forecast for 24-48 hours.

Inspection should happen twice yearly - once in spring after snow melt and again in fall before winter. Check for loose or protruding fasteners, cracked or split boards, wobbly railings, and signs of rot or insect damage. Pay special attention to areas where water collects, such as around posts and where the deck attaches to your house.

In Ottawa's climate, these areas are prone to ice damage and water infiltration.

For composite decking, maintenance is simpler but still necessary. Clean with soap and water or specialized composite cleaners, and remove debris that can stain or cause mold growth. While composite doesn't need staining, it can fade over time and may require periodic deep cleaning to remove embedded dirt.

Safety considerations include ensuring your deck can handle Ottawa's snow loads (typically 40-50 pounds per square foot). Clear snow regularly, especially wet, heavy snow. Never use rock salt on wood decks as it accelerates deterioration - use sand for traction instead.

Professional help is recommended for structural repairs, railing replacement, or if you notice significant sagging or movement. Any electrical work for deck lighting requires an ESA-certified electrician and proper permits through the City of Ottawa.

Next steps: Schedule your spring inspection now, clean thoroughly once temperatures consistently stay above 10°C, and plan your staining/sealing project for late spring or early summer. For major repairs or if you're unsure about structural integrity, browse verified contractors in our directory who understand Ottawa's specific climate challenges and building requirements.

How often should exterior paint be redone?

Exterior paint in Ottawa typically needs refreshing every 7-10 years, though this varies significantly based on your home's exposure, materials, and the quality of the previous paint job.

The harsh Ottawa climate is particularly tough on exterior paint. Our freeze-thaw cycles, intense summer UV exposure, and significant temperature swings from -30°C winters to +35°C summers cause paint to expand and contract repeatedly. This leads to cracking, peeling, and fading faster than in more moderate climates. Homes with **south and west-facing exposures** often show wear 2-3 years earlier than protected sides due to intense sun exposure.

Material type makes a huge difference in paint longevity. Wood siding typically needs repainting every 6-8 years, while fiber cement and properly prepared metal siding can go 8-12 years. Stucco and masonry surfaces often last 10-15 years between paint jobs. The quality of surface preparation and primer used during the last paint job is equally important - a rushed job with poor prep work might fail in just 3-4 years.

Signs it's time to repaint include chalking (paint powder coming off when you touch it), visible wood or substrate showing through, cracking or peeling paint, and significant fading. Don't wait until the paint is completely failing, as this leads to much more expensive surface preparation and potential substrate damage.

For Ottawa homes, **late spring through early fall** (May to September) provides the best painting conditions. Avoid painting when temperatures drop below 10°C or during high humidity periods. Many Ottawa homeowners book their exterior painting in January or February for spring completion, as good contractors fill up quickly.

Professional vs DIY considerations: While homeowners can handle single-story homes, multi-story painting involves significant safety risks and specialized equipment. Professional painters also have experience dealing with Ottawa's weather challenges and can spot underlying issues like wood rot or failing caulking that need attention.

Next steps: Walk around your home this spring and assess each side separately. Take photos of any problem areas and get quotes from 2-3 licensed painters if you're seeing multiple warning signs. A quality paint job costs \$3,000-8,000 for an average Ottawa home but protects your much larger investment in the house itself.

What is the best fence material for Ottawa?

For Ottawa's harsh freeze-thaw cycles and extreme temperature swings, pressure-treated wood and vinyl are the top fence materials, with cedar being the premium natural option.

Pressure-treated lumber remains the most popular choice for Ottawa homeowners, and for good reason. It handles our climate extremes well, from -30°C winters to +35°C summers, while resisting rot and insect damage. A 6-foot privacy fence typically costs \$25-40 per linear foot installed, making it budget-friendly for most properties. The wood naturally weathers to a silver-gray, or you can stain it every 3-5 years to maintain appearance. Quality pressure-treated pine or spruce will last 15-20 years in Ottawa's climate.

Vinyl fencing has gained popularity as a low-maintenance alternative that won't crack, warp, or fade in our temperature extremes. While the upfront cost is higher at \$35-55 per linear foot, it requires virtually no maintenance and comes with 20-25 year warranties. Modern vinyl formulations are specifically designed for Canadian climates and won't become brittle in our cold winters like older versions did.

Cedar fencing represents the premium natural option at \$40-65 per linear foot. Eastern white cedar, readily available in Ontario, naturally resists rot and insects while developing an attractive weathered appearance. It's particularly well-suited to Ottawa's climate and will last 20-25 years with minimal maintenance.

Aluminum and steel options work well but are typically more expensive (\$45-80 per linear foot) and better suited for decorative or pool fencing rather than privacy applications. Chain link remains the most economical option at \$15-25 per linear foot but offers no privacy.

Ottawa-specific considerations include our 4-foot frost line, which requires fence posts to be set deeper than in milder climates. The City of Ottawa allows fences up to 6 feet in rear yards and 4 feet in front yards without permits, though corner lots have additional sight-line restrictions. Always call Ontario One Call (1-800-400-2255) before digging to locate utilities.

Professional installation is recommended for Ottawa's challenging soil conditions and frost requirements. Proper post setting with concrete and gravel drainage is crucial for longevity in our freeze-thaw cycles. Most contractors book fence installations from May through October, with spring being the busiest season.

Next steps: Measure your property lines, check with neighbors about shared fence agreements, and get quotes from multiple contractors. Consider your long-term maintenance preferences and budget when choosing materials - the cheapest upfront option isn't always the most economical over time in Ottawa's demanding climate.

Q6

How do I prevent ice dams on my roof?

Ice dams form when heat escapes through your roof, melting snow that refreezes at the cold eaves, creating a barrier that backs water under your shingles. The key to prevention is proper insulation, ventilation, and air sealing in your attic space.

Proper Attic Insulation and Air Sealing is your first line of defense. Your attic should have R-50 to R-60 insulation (about 16-20 inches of blown-in cellulose or fiberglass) to meet Ontario Building Code requirements. More importantly, you need to seal all air leaks between your heated living space and the attic. Common culprit areas include around pot lights, plumbing penetrations, electrical boxes, and the attic hatch. Even small gaps can allow warm air to escape, creating hot spots on your roof that trigger ice dam formation.

Adequate roof ventilation works hand-in-hand with insulation. You need both intake vents (typically soffit vents) and exhaust vents (ridge vents or roof vents) to create proper airflow that keeps your roof deck cold. The Ontario Building Code requires 1 square foot of ventilation for every 300 square feet of attic space, split equally between intake and exhaust. Many Ottawa homes, especially older ones in neighborhoods like the Glebe or Alta Vista, have insufficient or blocked ventilation.

Ottawa's harsh freeze-thaw cycles make ice dams particularly problematic here. Our winters regularly see temperatures swinging from -20°C to just above freezing, creating perfect conditions for repeated melting and refreezing. The heavy snow loads we receive (often 2-4 feet on roofs) provide plenty of material for ice dam formation. This is especially challenging for the many post-war bungalows throughout Ottawa that often have shallow roof pitches and minimal eave overhangs.

Professional assessment is recommended if you're experiencing recurring ice dams. An energy auditor can identify heat loss patterns using thermal imaging, while a qualified roofer can evaluate your ventilation system. Electrical work for adding ventilation fans requires an ESA permit, and any structural modifications need city permits. For immediate winter relief, roof heating cables can provide temporary protection, but they're not a long-term solution and increase energy costs.

Next steps include having your attic insulation levels checked (many Ottawa homes are under-insulated), sealing air leaks before adding insulation, and ensuring your roof ventilation is adequate and unblocked. If you're planning a roof replacement, consider ice and water shield membrane extending at least 3 feet past the interior wall line - this provides backup protection if ice dams do form.

How do I improve my home's curb appeal?

Improving your home's curb appeal is one of the most cost-effective ways to increase your property value, with simple updates often providing returns of 100-200% when selling. Focus on your front entrance, landscaping, and exterior maintenance as these create the strongest first impression for visitors and potential buyers.

Start with your front entrance, which serves as your home's focal point. A fresh coat of paint on your front door in a bold, welcoming color can instantly transform your home's appearance for just \$50-100 in materials. Consider colors that complement your home's exterior - deep blues and rich reds work well with Ottawa's many brick homes, while classic black or navy suits most architectural styles. Replace or upgrade your door hardware, house numbers, and mailbox for a cohesive look. Adding a quality doormat and seasonal planters flanking the entrance creates warmth and invitation.

Landscaping improvements offer excellent value in Ottawa's climate. Focus on foundation plantings with a mix of evergreens for year-round structure and perennials that thrive in Eastern Ontario's Zone 5a climate. Hostas, daylilies, and ornamental grasses are low-maintenance options that handle Ottawa's variable weather well. Edge your garden beds cleanly and apply fresh mulch each spring - this simple step makes even modest plantings look professionally maintained. For larger impact, consider adding a small tree to your front yard if space permits; maples, serviceberries, and ornamental cherries are excellent choices for Ottawa properties.

Exterior maintenance is crucial for Ottawa homes due to our harsh freeze-thaw cycles and significant weather variations. Power wash your siding, walkways, and driveway annually - this alone can make a dramatic difference for \$100-200 if you rent equipment. Clean your windows inside and out, and consider upgrading to energy-efficient models if your current ones are dated. Inspect and repair any damaged siding, trim, or masonry, as small issues become major problems in Ottawa's climate if left unaddressed.

Lighting upgrades extend your curb appeal into evening hours. Replace basic porch lights with attractive fixtures that match your home's style, and consider adding low-voltage landscape lighting to highlight key features like mature trees or architectural details. Solar options have improved significantly and require no electrical work.

Seasonal considerations are important in Ottawa. Plan major landscaping for late spring after the frost risk passes, typically mid-May. Fall is excellent for planting trees and shrubs, giving them time to establish before winter. Keep winter curb appeal in mind - evergreen plantings, attractive outdoor lighting, and a well-maintained snow removal plan all contribute to year-round appeal.

Budget-friendly improvements under \$500 include fresh door paint, new house numbers, seasonal planters, mulching, and thorough cleaning. Mid-range projects (\$500-2,000) might include new front steps, upgraded lighting, or professional landscaping design. Higher-end improvements could involve new windows, stone or brick work, or comprehensive landscape renovation.

Professional guidance is valuable for larger projects. Landscape designers can maximize your property's potential, while contractors should handle any structural improvements to walkways, steps, or major hardscaping. Always obtain permits for significant changes like new driveways or retaining walls over 4 feet in Ottawa.

Start with a critical assessment of your home's exterior, prioritize the most impactful improvements within your budget, and tackle projects systematically for the best results.

Q8

What siding material lasts longest?

Fiber cement siding offers the best longevity for Ottawa homeowners, typically lasting 50+ years with minimal maintenance, followed closely by vinyl siding which can last 30-40 years in our climate.

When considering durability in Ottawa's harsh freeze-thaw cycles and temperature swings from -30°C to +35°C, **fiber cement siding** stands out as the champion. Brands like James Hardie and Allura are engineered to handle extreme weather without cracking, warping, or fading. This material resists moisture infiltration, won't attract insects, and maintains its appearance for decades. The only maintenance required is repainting every 10-15 years, and even that's optional with pre-finished products.

Vinyl siding comes in second for longevity, especially newer formulations designed for Canadian climates. Quality vinyl siding can easily last 30-40 years in Ottawa, with some premium products carrying 50-year warranties. It won't rot, rust, or need painting, though it can become brittle in extreme cold and may crack if impacted during winter months. The key is choosing thicker gauge vinyl (.044" or higher) specifically rated for our climate zone.

Engineered wood siding like LP SmartSide offers excellent durability when properly installed, typically lasting 30+ years. It's treated to resist moisture and insects, though it requires more maintenance than fiber cement. **Natural wood siding** like cedar can last 30-50 years but demands regular staining or painting every 3-5 years in Ottawa's UV-intense summers and wet springs.

Aluminum siding was popular in the 1970s-80s and can last 40+ years, but it dents easily and can look dated. **Steel siding** offers similar longevity but requires careful attention to prevent rust, especially where snow

accumulates against the house.

For Ottawa's climate specifically, avoid **stucco systems** on the main walls - our freeze-thaw cycles cause cracking that leads to water infiltration and expensive repairs. Brick veneer lasts indefinitely but isn't technically siding.

Professional installation is crucial regardless of material choice. Poor flashing, inadequate vapor barriers, or improper fastening will drastically reduce any siding's lifespan. Most siding failures in Ottawa result from installation errors rather than material defects.

Next steps: Get quotes from multiple contractors for your preferred materials, verify they're familiar with Ottawa Building Code requirements for vapor barriers and insulation, and check references from recent local projects. Quality installation often matters more than the specific material chosen.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of October 18, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.