

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO HIRING THE RIGHT DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR



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As a homeowner, you take pride in the appearance of your property. You work hard to keep the grass trimmed, and the vegetation looking green and healthy. But although watering and fertilizing may come naturally to you, understanding your property's drainage issues may leave you scratching your head. Sure, the problems created by your lawn's poor drainage may be evident, but coming up with a workable solution for the underlying issues may not be quite as obvious. Whether the water from your downspout is pooling around your home's foundation, or a small lake seems to appear on your lawn each time it rains, inadequate drainage can result in frustration, costly damages and can even have a negative impact on the environment. But why is this happening, anyway? And how can you promote healthier drainage?

The answers to these and other related questions are quite involved. After all, there could be multiple reasons for your home's drainage issues, and each problem will demand its own unique solution. As such, pinpointing your property's specific issues will require a detailed assessment. Are you up to the task?

For most homeowners, the process of evaluating the culprit(s) behind poor drainage can be a bit vexing, and quite complicated. Often, the best course of action is to solicit the help of a drainage contractor who will be able to tell you exactly what is going wrong, and will come up with an expert solution.

This, of course, leads to the question of how to go about finding a reliable drainage contractor - and do you really need one? To eliminate all doubt, we have put together this user-friendly guide that will help you to understand what is going on with your property, why hiring an expert is in your best interest and how to narrow down your options and find the right contractor for the job.



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UNDERSTANDING COMMON DRAINAGE ISSUES



To start off, let's explore, briefly, some of the most common causes of poor drainage. One of the biggest complaints that homeowners have is with regards to dips on their lawn. During a rainstorm, the ground will quickly become saturated with water.

When the earth can no longer absorb any more of the moisture, it will begin to pool, or collect, in the lowest laying areas of the property. Ultimately, this can lead to erosion, cause property damage, and can also create an excessive amount of stormwater runoff.

Another common issue has to do with slopes or dips on a home's driveway or front walkway. It doesn't take long for water to accumulate in these areas, and soon, flooding may occur. Not only can excess water cause harm to your home's exterior foundation, but it may also find its way inside of your garage, or through basement sills. Similar problems can also occur when the water from your downspout is not discharged into an area with proper drainage.

So what is the solution to these problems? Although you may initially be tempted to simply run a piece of flexible pipe from your downspout to the street, this "quick fix" will do little more than contribute to stormwater runoff, and the contamination of local water supplies. For the results that you desire, a much more comprehensive drainage solution is necessary.

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SOLVING DRAINAGE ISSUES: GOING IN ALONE VS. HIRING A CONTRACTOR

Despite the fact that highly effective home drainage systems are readily available on the market, the process of properly installing these systems can be a bit of a challenge for the average homeowner. Installing a solution that will capture runoff water, filter it for debris, encourage healthy drainage and then safely direct excess water away from your property involves a lot of careful planning and work. A mistake during the process could result in cosmetic and other significant damages to your property.

Although a skilled Do-It-Yourselfer might give consideration to installing a home drainage system as a means of cutting back on costs, it's important that you understand exactly what you're getting into, before you start tearing up your yard. First, you'll need to find out if your local municipality will require you to apply for a permit. Because drainage solutions will exit to city streets and storm drains, you may be required to follow certain local ordinances.

Of course, you will also need to pinpoint the trouble spots, and determine which type of drainage solution you will require. For downspout runoff or low laying areas of the yard, you might consider a catch basin system that directs water via a perforated pipe, allowing the majority of water to percolate slowly back into the ground. If you have a drainage problem on hard surfaces, like your driveway or front walk, however, you will need to look into the installation of a channel drain.



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SOLVING DRAINAGE ISSUES: GOING IN ALONE VS. HIRING A CONTRACTOR (cont.)



Regardless of the system that you select, however, you will be required not only to excavate the area or the actual drainage grade, but you will also need to dig out a trench for directing excess water. Perforated piping will need to be laid (holes down) in the trench, and the space should be filled with gravel - the more, the better. You'll need to do your homework to determine the correct size and schedule of piping, as well as the best size of gravel for your project.

Because the process of planning, excavating, hauling supplies and installing the system can be very labor-intensive, most homeowners make the decision to leaving the work to the professionals. An experienced drainage contractor will have the skills that are necessary to complete the job faster, neater and with far more precision.

Relinquishing control to the experts will not only save you a lot of time and effort, but will enable you to enjoy the peace of mind that the drainage system will be installed with complete accuracy.

Making the choice to work with a drainage contractor should not be taken lightly. While there are numerous drainage and landscaping professionals to choose from, it's imperative that you take the time to find the right fit for you, and for your needs. Fortunately, separating the best from the rest is not as difficult as you might imagine, when you know what to look for.

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10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR

You may be eager to get the ball rolling on your home drainage project, but you should never cut corners when hiring a contractor. To get a good feel for the professionals available in your area, you should talk to at least 3 - 5 different contractors. When interviewing your prospects, be sure to ask these 10 questions.

Question #1: How long have you been in business, and how long have you been working in this area?

For obvious reasons, it's best to find a contractor with years of industry experience. A drainage professional with his own, well-established business will not only have accumulated the experience from operating his own company, but will also have acquired skills and knowledge by working for previous employers. It's also smart to find out how long the contractor has worked in the New Jersey area. The drainage needs for homes in the Northeast may be quite different from property's in the Southwest, so it's important that your professional is familiar with your specific geographical needs. Finally, ask about the experience levels of the contractor's employees. Have they, too, been working on home drainage systems for years, or are they new to the industry? This could seriously impact the quality of the work.

Question #2: Do you specialize in drainage solutions, or do you cover a wide range of work?

There are quite a few landscaping, sprinkler and foundation companies that have some experience with installing home drainage systems, but this is usually completed as a "side business." Because these contractors do not actually specialize in drainage, though, you may not receive as thorough of an evaluation as is necessary. In addition to this, they may not have the skills or ability to install your home drainage system as neatly, precisely and quickly as a more specialized professional. To ensure that your drainage solution is efficient, effective and long-lasting, you would be best served to select a contractor who specifically focuses on drainage.



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10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR (cont.)

Question #3: How does your appraisal process work?

It's important to find out exactly how your prospective contractor plans to appraise the level of work to be involved with your project. Does the contractor offer free estimates to homeowners, or is there a fee involved? Be sure to also ask about whether or not a representative from the company will physically evaluate your property when providing an estimate, or if they will simply conduct a phone interview with you. When an in-person consultation does occur, be sure that the contractor takes careful measurements for distance and elevation. These measurements can play a crucial role in determining the overall design of your home's drainage system. Generally speaking, you should be wary of a contractor who is not interested in meeting with you in person to assess your drainage needs. This could result in an inadequate appraisal, and end up costing you more down the road. Lastly, if one contractor's appraisal seems significantly lower or higher than its competitors, throw it out. The bids you receive should actually be relatively similar.



Question #4: How do you detail your appraisal?

Will your contractor provide you with a line-item, detailed proposal for the necessary work, or will they simply throw a lump-sum estimate your way? Will drawings also be included? It's never a good idea to accept an appraisal that does not include a detailed description of the scope of work. You should know, up front, exactly what it is that needs to be done to your property, and what it is that you will be paying for. When an appraisal lacks detail, it should send up a red flag that the contractor may not intend to do a very thorough job of installing your home drainage system.

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10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR (cont.)

Question #5: Is your bid an estimate or a fixed price?

Typically, the answer to this will go hand-in-hand with the previous two questions. This is because in many cases, a contractor who does not take the time to carefully assess your drainage needs and provide you with a detailed estimate will be unable to do much more than give you a ballpark figure for the work.

As the job progresses, then, you may find that the price goes up, as the drainage professional discovers further problem areas.

A contractor who provides you with a line-item estimate, on the other hand, is far less likely to alter the price throughout the course of the work. In the event that a situation does arise in which costs will be affected, your contractor should propose the adjustments to you in the form of a change order.

Question #6: Can you provide proof of insurance?

Before you can ever allow a contractor to begin work on your property, it is imperative that you take the time to verify that they carry the proper forms of insurance, and that their policies are both valid and current.

If one of the workers were to injure himself on the job, or en route to the job, or if damages were sustained to your property, you need to have the assurance that you will be fully protected. As such, you should confirm that the contractor carries general liability, worker's compensation and auto insurance.

Your drainage professional should have no problem with allowing you to verify this with their insurance carrier, or to provide you with a certificate of insurance.

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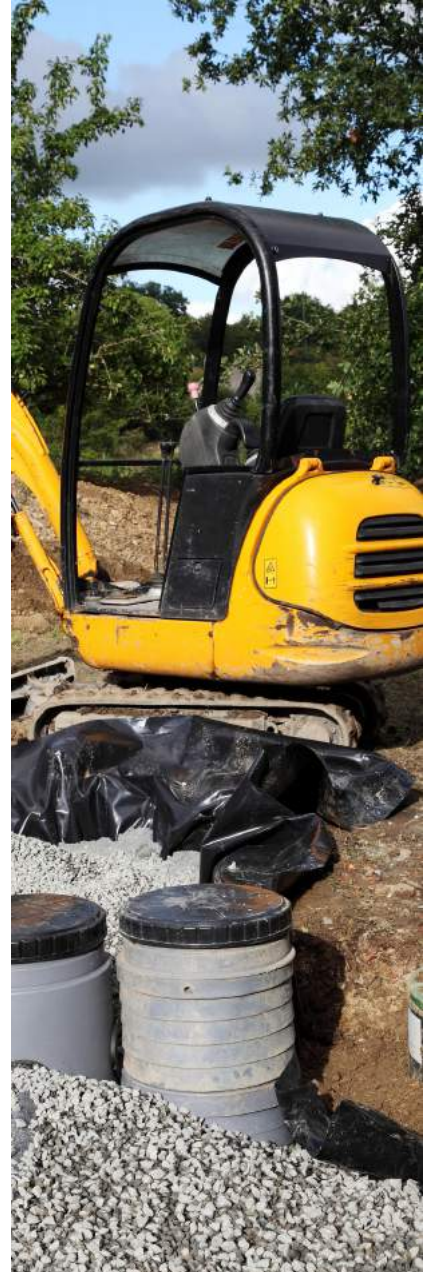
10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR (cont.)

Question #7: What kind of disruptions to my life will this project present?

Another major consideration to be made involves the extent to which the project will disrupt your life. Ask your prospective contractors for an estimated schedule of work, detailing how long the job will take, from start to finish. Will someone need to be home while the workers are on-site? If so, you may need to make arrangements to take time off of work, or plan to have the job completed during the weekend. Will weekend work cost more? You'll also want to find out how much of your property will need to be torn up or used throughout the process, and how much noise the work will generate. Finally, always ask about whether or not your access to household utilities like water or electricity will be limited in any way.

Question #8: I'd like to meet the project foreman - can I visit a project he's running?

It's always a good idea to set up a meeting with the foreman who will be leading your home's project. The best way to do this is by making a visit to a job that he is currently running. Not only will this give you a chance to become comfortable with the person responsible for your property's drainage system, but you will also get a taste of how he manages his team, and his job site. Do he and his team work well together? Are they courteous and professional? Is the job site neat and safe? These questions can all be cleared up by visiting a project firsthand.



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10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE DRAINAGE CONTRACTOR (cont.)

Question #9: Can you provide me with images of your past work? May I contact past clients for reviews of you and your work?

A great drainage contractor will always be happy to provide you with examples of their past work. When a contractor takes pride in what they do, they will keep a portfolio of photos of jobs that they have successfully completed. Be sure to request both before and after photos, so that you can get a better idea of what was actually done. Don't hesitate to also ask your drainage professional for references from previous clients. Speaking with an individual who has worked with your prospects in the past will be invaluable in terms of finding the right contractor.

Question #10: Can I have a proposal in writing?

Never agree to work with a contractor without first obtaining a proposal in writing. Even if you think you can trust a particular drainage professional, there's always the chance that something could go wrong. If, for example, the contractor verbally promised to address three problem areas on your property, but only addressed one, you will certainly not want to be billed for the work that was not completed. Without a written contract in place, however, you cannot prove that the contractor didn't hold up his end of the bargain. A reputable drainage company will understand that offering a written proposal is important in terms of protecting both their clients, and their business.



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Partnering With a Third Party to Find the Right Drainage Contractor



It's the natural tendency of most homeowners to turn to the Internet to begin their search for a drainage contractor. But while reading over online reviews can sometimes be helpful, this feedback is not always completely accurate or well informed.

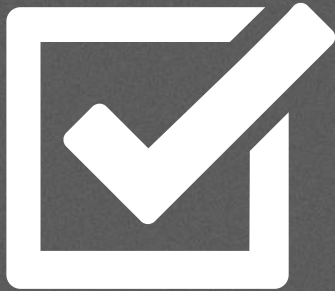
Ultimately, your best resource for finding the right contractor for your needs is a third party, like Braen Supply. With more than 100 years in the industry, we have a vast database of highly trained drainage professionals who we can recommend for your project to be completed properly.

At Braen Supply, we've seen a variety of jobs that have been resolved successfully and some that have gone bad. At the end of the day, we have both the contractor's and the homeowner's best interests in mind. We want to ensure that each is matched up perfectly so the homeowner has the best contractor for the job.

We know which contractors specialize in installing home drainage systems and which ones offer it as a secondary service. Having this insight is what helps Braen Supply find the best contractors for each and every project. With an outside look at all of your prospective contractors, you will be much better prepared to make the right decision throughout the hiring process.

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CHECKLIST

- ☐ How long have you been in business, and how long have you been working in this area?
- ☐ Do you specialize in drainage solutions or do you cover a wide range of work?
- ☐ How does your appraisal process work?
- ☐ How do you detail your proposal?
- ☐ Is your bid an estimate or a fixed price?
- ☐ Can you provide proof of insurance?
- ☐ What kind of disruptions to my life will this project present?
- ☐ Can I visit a project your foreman is running?
- ☐ Can you provide me with images of your past work? May I contact past clients for reviews of you and your work?
- ☐ Can I have a proposal in writing?



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Final Thoughts



Regardless of what specific drainage problems you are dealing with, it's very important that you make an effort to take care of it right away. Quick fixes may seem to improve things for a little while, but will only create bigger and more expensive issues in the end. That's why it's so critical that you take the time to find the best drainage contractor for the job.

Don't let yourself get caught up with numbers; quality, experience, reliability and integrity are what truly matter. By doing your research, interviewing 3-5 prospective contractors and working with a trusted third party source you'll find that it's much easier to narrow down all of your options and hire the best of the best. At the end of the day, though, there is nothing more valuable than feeling comfortable with your contractor, and feeling as though they truly care about, and can handle, all of your home's drainage needs.

