

What to Know About Roof Installation for Additions and ADUs

Why Additions and ADUs Change the Roofing Game

Adding a bedroom, a home office, or a full accessory dwelling unit to your property changes more than your square footage. It changes the way your roof works. A new structure attached to an existing house or standing on its own over a garage creates a junction where water, heat, and structural loads behave differently. A roof installation for additions and ADUs has to account for that transition, and doing it right means planning for the specific conditions of Austin and Travis County.

I have seen too many homeowners treat an addition like a detached shed, slapping on a roof with the same materials and methods they used on the main house without considering the seam. That seam is where leaks start. The new roof has to tie into the existing one with flashing, step flashing, and sometimes a cricket to divert water. If you are adding a second story, the load path changes entirely. The roof deck becomes a floor, and the underlayment has to handle foot traffic during construction as well as weather.

Material Choices That Hold Up in Central Texas

When I work with homeowners on an ADU project, the first question is always about the roof covering. Austin gets intense sun, sudden hail, and the occasional freeze. Asphalt shingles are still a solid choice for many additions because they are affordable and easy to install around complex roof lines. But if you want something that lasts longer and stands up to the UV, you might look at synthetic slate. Products like GAF Timberline HD give you the look of slate without the weight or the cost, and they handle the temperature swings of Central Texas better than natural slate.

Metal roofing is another option that has grown in popularity for ADUs, especially modern designs with low slopes. Standing seam metal sheds water fast and reflects heat. But metal comes with trade-offs. It can be noisy in a hailstorm, and if the pitch is too low, you need a solid ice and water shield under the panels. A good roof underlayment is critical with metal because condensation forms on the underside. I always specify a self-adhered membrane like GAF Camelot for low-slope metal roofs in this climate. It sticks to the deck and seals around fasteners, which keeps moisture out even if the metal gets pinhole damage.

Tile roofing gives a timeless look that suits many Austin neighborhoods. Concrete or clay tiles add thermal mass, which helps keep an ADU cooler in summer. But tile is heavy. The structure has to be engineered for it, and that can drive up the framing cost. If you are converting an

existing garage into an ADU, the original roof may not be strong enough for tile without reinforcement. I have seen projects where a lightweight synthetic slate or a modified bitumen roof made more sense because the structure could not take the extra dead load.

The Layers You Cannot Skip

A roof is only as good as its weakest layer. For any addition or ADU, the decking is usually OSB sheathing or plywood. OSB is common in new construction because it is strong and cost-effective. But it swells if it gets wet before the roofing goes on. I always tell contractors to get the underlayment on as soon as the deck is dry. A self-adhered ice and water shield along the eaves and in all valleys buys you time and protection. If a storm rolls in before the shingles or metal are installed, that membrane keeps the interior dry.

Drip edge is another detail that gets overlooked. The drip edge goes at the eaves and rakes to pull water away from the fascia. Without it, water can curl back under the shingles and rot the deck. On an addition that butts up against an existing wall, the drip edge has to be integrated with the wall flashing. The same goes for roof penetrations like vent pipes for the ADU's bathroom or kitchen exhaust. Every penetration needs a boot or a flashing collar sealed with a compatible mastic.

Ventilation Is Not Optional

In Austin, attics get hot. An unvented roof on an ADU can turn the living space below into an oven. Proper ventilation requires soffit vents at the eaves and a roof ridge vent at the peak. The ridge vent allows hot air to escape, while the soffit vents pull cooler air in from the underside of the eaves. For an addition that shares a roof with the main house, you may need to extend the existing ridge vent or add a separate one for the new section. GAF Royal Sovereign shingles have a built-in ventilation channel that works with their ridge vent system, which simplifies the install for smaller additions.

I have inspected too many ADU roofs where the builder skipped the ridge vent to save a few hundred dollars. The result is an attic that hits 140 degrees in July, which radiates heat down into the living space and shortens the life of the shingles. A ridge vent pays for itself in energy savings and roof longevity within a couple of years.

Flashing and Transitions

The most common failure point on an addition roof is where the new roof meets the old wall. If the addition is built against a brick or siding wall, you need a step-flashed counter-flashing system. The step flashing is bent into each mortar joint or siding course, then covered with a counter-flashing cap. On stucco walls, I prefer a surface-mounted reglet with a sealant. The

trick is to make sure the underlayment extends up the wall at least six inches behind the flashing. Water that gets driven by wind will hit that membrane and run back down onto the roof instead of into the wall cavity.

For an ADU that sits over a garage, the roof may be flat or low-slope. That calls for a different approach. A modified bitumen roof with a granulated cap sheet works well on low slopes in Texas. It handles ponding water better than shingles, and it can be torched down or self-adhered. The seams need to be rolled with a heavy roller to ensure full adhesion. I always specify a tapered insulation system on flat ADU roofs to create a slight slope toward the drains. Standing water is the enemy of every low-slope roof.

Permitting and Code Considerations in Travis County

Travis County and the City of Austin have adopted the International Residential Code with some local amendments. For additions and ADUs, the roof has to meet wind uplift resistance and impact resistance for hail. The code requires a minimum of two layers of underlayment on slopes below 4:12. If you use asphalt shingles, they need to be fastened with six nails per shingle in high-wind areas. I have seen inspectors flag roofs that were nailed with only four. The GAF certification program includes training on these exact fastener patterns, which is why I recommend working with a certified contractor.

One more thing about ADUs: if the unit is detached, the roof can be simpler because there is no transition to an existing wall. But if it is attached by a breezeway or a shared wall, the fire rating of the roof assembly may come into play. The code may require a Class A or Class B fire rating for the roof covering, depending on the proximity to the property line. Synthetic slate and metal roofing usually meet Class A. Asphalt shingles are Class B. Check with the local building department before you buy materials.

Practical Tips for a Smooth Installation

A [roof installation for additions and ADUs](#) goes smoother when you think about access and staging from the start. The new roof is often close to the house or to a fence, which limits where you can set up ladders and stack materials. I have seen crews waste half a day because they did not plan where to put the bundles of shingles. If you are using GAF Timberline HD, the panels are larger than standard shingles and need to be staged flat on a level surface. Warped panels will not lie flat, and they will show a wavy line in the finished roof.

Here are a few things I always check before a roof install on an addition or ADU:

- The existing roof deck at the junction is sound and free of rot. If the old deck is compromised, the new flashing will not seal.

- The drip edge extends at least one inch past the fascia to prevent water from running back.
- Soffit vents are installed in every soffit bay, not just a few. Unvented bays trap heat and moisture.
- The ridge vent is continuous across the entire peak, with no gaps at the ends.
- All underlayment overlaps are sealed with a compatible lap cement or self-adhered strip.

Another detail that matters is the starter course. On an addition, the eave line may not be perfectly straight if the existing house settled over time. A straight chalk line at the eave ensures the first course of shingles is level. That line determines the look of the whole roof. If it is off, every course above it will be off, and the ridge vent will not align properly.

Final Thoughts from the Field

A well-planned roof installation for additions and ADUs protects your investment and gives you a comfortable, dry living space for decades. The extra time spent on proper flashing, ventilation, and material selection pays off every time it rains. In a climate like Austin's, where the sun can degrade an underlayment in a single summer, using a quality ice and water shield and a certified contractor makes a real difference. I have seen too many additions that leaked within two years because someone cut corners on the transition flashing or used a cheap underlayment. Do not let your project be one of them.

Whether you are adding a master suite with a complex roofline or a simple ADU over a garage, treat the roof as a system. The deck, underlayment, ventilation, flashing, and covering all work together. If one part fails, the rest follows. Take the time to get each layer right, and you will have a roof that looks good and performs even better through every Texas season.