

# Playground Buyer's Guide



Congratulations! You are about to make one of the most fun purchases available. Owning a new playground brings people together for exercise, camaraderie, and fun. Although the end results are the best part, the journey of getting there can also be fun with the right information. Accordingly, we've created this guide to assist you in your process of purchasing new playground equipment. We've outlined some of the basics and also included a few tips that we've discovered along the way to help you get the most

bang for your buck. If you have any questions, please let us know. We'll be happy to assist you.

## Step 1) Begin with the End in Mind

The first step in this process is to decide what you want to accomplish. In other words, when the project is finished, what should be the end result? The key is to ask a lot of questions at the beginning. These questions will include:

- What age group is being emphasized? (infants and toddlers, elementary age, all inclusive)
- How many children should the playground accommodate? (5-10 kids, 75+, or in between)
- Are there any special needs to address? (mobility impairments, ramp access, etc.)
- Is there a specific theme for the area? (nature look, pirates, body-weight climbing activities)
- What is the space available for the new playground? (dimensions, sidewalks, buildings, etc.)
- What is the approximate budget available? (this is important in order to allocate correctly)
- What is the general time frame for project completion? (next month, next fall, next year)
- Who will perform the installation? (self-install, volunteer or community build, our installers)

The answers to these questions will allow us to help you focus in on your preferences and specifics. In addition, there are numerous safety factors that we will help you consider, and knowing this information allows you to have complete confidence that your new playground fully meets all of the current safety guidelines. For example, if you have a narrower space, your design can be modified to accommodate that and still meet the safety requirements. Or, if you have a \$50,000 budget, we'll want to look at something bigger than \$8,000 playground designs to maximize your play value.

Having a good idea of what you want at the beginning also makes it much easier to plan and get it accomplished. For example, if you decide that you'd like to have a playground to accommodate roughly 30 children, ages 2-12, and fit in a space of about 40' x 60', with an approximate budget of \$41,000, and a completion date of 8 weeks, you are in a much better position to make that happen than having none of that information available. Even having approximate ballpark information allows you and our designers to create ideas and options to help you maximize your time, vision and budget.

## Step 2) Design Your Space!

The second step in this process is taking the information you've achieved in the first step and now working with your design professional to create initial design concepts and ideas. We have some of the most creative designers in the business, and we'll spend time looking at what's important to you and creating fun playground design concepts for you to review. This step is interactive between you and our design team, and we will listen to your feedback of what you love in the designs and if there's anything you'd prefer to change. We'll walk with you every step of the way to make sure the final design is perfectly suited for you and fully compliant with all applicable safety and accessibility guidelines as well.

During this design process, we'll also discuss any color scheme ideas you may have and how to implement those into the final design. For example, perhaps the design should match school colors, or maybe it should have more of a natural look for a park setting, or it could be bright and visible with vibrant primary colors. It's up to you, and you'll be able to see exactly what your new playground will look like.



*Natural theme playground design and color scheme*

## Step 3) Surfacing

The third step is deciding which type of safety surfacing you will select. This is a very important decision to discuss with your team and our professionals. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that almost 80% of serious playground injuries happen as a result of falls. Therefore, the decision on which surfacing to use is not only important for safety and accessibility reasons, but it should also add to the overall aesthetics and feel of the playground area.



*Rubber surfacing with custom designs and colors*

For example, if you're trying to achieve a more natural look, then perhaps wood chips would be a good choice as pictured above. By contrast, if you are creating a bright, energetic play area, then a poured-in-place rubber surfacing with designs and various colors would be a good choice as this picture shows. As an additional resource, we have created a **Safety Surface Comparison** chart in our Resources page to help you see the features and benefits of each type of surfacing when making this choice. Your design professional can assist you with this to ensure you have the appropriate surfacing.

## Step 4) Furnish It!

The fourth step is to determine what site furnishings are needed. This will include benches, picnic tables, and trash receptacles. Depending on your area, you may need more or fewer of these, but it's always a good idea to plan for a bench or two that parents can sit to watch their children play, a trash receptacle to keep the area clean, and maybe a picnic table or two for families to gather around a meal after some fun play time.

Like your new playground design, our design professionals can help you choose the right site furnishings to fit your area and budget. In addition, we can color coordinate your site furnishings to match the playground, or use a different color palette to bring some contrast to the area. Regardless of the options you choose, site furnishings bring the welcoming, aesthetic touch to the play area.

## Step 5) Shade

The fifth step in the process is to address any potential shade or shelter additions. The sun can be very hot on the playground, especially during the summer months, and providing a brief respite with some shade or shelter can be a welcome relief.

Shade and shelter options will vary in design and pricing, much like your new playground does. An important consideration is any specific requirements for shade (preschools and daycares), as well as determining if a large area needs to be covered or if a smaller area will do. There are numerous options available to provide shade or shelter for your new play area, and your design professional can assist you in determining the correct size, shape, and location of your new shade or shelter.



*Rectangle shade over playground area*

## Step 6) Budget

The sixth step in the process is the approximate allocation of the total budget to each component in the project. Having a good idea of what can be expected with regards to how much of the total budget to allocate to each specific section can save many surprises later in the project. One mistake we see frequently is for a project to have a budget of a certain amount, and the owner choose a playground design for the same amount (example: \$25,000 budget = \$25,000 playground). When items like freight and delivery, surfacing, sales tax, etc. get added in, it's easy to break the budget. Therefore, we recommend using these approximate percentages to allocate your total budget with. Disclaimer: These are simply generic recommendations based on our experience. There are numerous factors that may change these numbers based on your specific situation. We only present this as a guide, and our team can help you maximize your design and budget to find additional cost savings and more play value.

- Equipment – 50% - 70% of total budget (includes playground, site furnishings, shade, and shelter)
- Surfacing – 15% - 35% (this depends upon type of surfacing and size of area to be covered)
- Freight & Delivery – 5% - 15% (depends on location, time of year, multiple items on same truck, etc)
- Installation – 0% - 40% (depends on size / type of equipment, special tools needed (cranes), location)
- Sales Tax – 0% - 10% - (depends on tax exempt status, city and county taxes, special assessments)
- Permits & Licensing – 0% - 5% (depends on any required permits, licenses, or drawings by city/state)

## Step 7) Time Frame

The final step in the process is having an accurate expectation of the timeframe required to bring your vision and ideas into reality. Knowing in what time frame the project can expect to be completed makes for an easier process for all concerned. Like the percentages above for budget allocation, these are approximations based on the average time it takes for most projects. Of course, some projects move faster, others move slower depending on situational specifics. Our goal is to give you a realistic planning tool for your project.

- **Initial Information** – 2 days (this is information from Step 1. This may take time for you to decide)
- **Concept drawings** – 3-5 days (this will be adjusted based on revisions and size of project. We also double check that the concept designs meet or exceed the current safety guidelines)
- **Shade or Shelter** – 1-2 weeks (these structures are more regulated by construction laws and may require extra time for an engineer to verify drawings and permits, especially if a city requires it)
- **Site Furnishings** – 1-2 days (depends on type, style and quantity of site furnishings)
- **Freight and Delivery** – 1-2 days (depends on factory schedule, destination, available trucks, etc)
- **Manufacturing** – 4-6 weeks (depends on time of year, size of project, items ordered)
- **Installation** – 1-3 weeks (depends on size of project, time of year, readiness of site for install, etc)
- **Surfacing** – 2-4 days (depends on type of surfacing, other requirements (cure time for rubber), etc)

As you can see, there are many variables within one project, depending on the scope and size. Some items may apply; others do not. This is where you will find great value in the experience of our design professionals, as they can help monitor progress of your project, and we will keep you informed every step of the way. With that in mind, for most playground projects that do not require special permitting or licenses, a realistic expectation of time frame would be approximately 8-10 weeks from initial drawings to completed install.

## **Conclusion**

This is a fun time, and we are excited for you! We hope this information has helped you gain a greater understanding of the playground purchasing process. In our more than 20+ years in this business, we have found that the best ideas come from a collaboration between our customer and our design professionals. Our creativity and experience combined with our customer's vision and ideas have allowed us to help thousands of satisfied customers make their ideas a reality. We would be honored to assist you as well. Children's Specialties is second to none in our ability to create fun and safe spaces for children of all ages. We appreciate the opportunity to serve you on your project. Please contact us today.

## **Children's Specialties**

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