

FREE BUYER'S GUIDE

The Home Sauna Buyer's Guide

How to choose between sauna and steam, pick the right type and size, and plan the electrical, ventilation and space work before you buy.

A home sauna is two purchases in one: the cabin or room, and the installation that has to happen around it. Buyers who plan only the first one end up with an expensive box they cannot power, cannot vent, or cannot get through the door. This guide runs the decision in the right order, from what kind of heat you want, through sizing and materials, to the electrical and space checks that decide whether a given unit is even possible in your home.

Step 1: Dry Heat or Wet Heat

This is the fork in the road, and it is mostly a question of what feels good to you rather than which is objectively better. If you have not experienced both, visit a gym, spa or club and try each before you spend anything.

THE FOUR MAIN FORMATS COMPARED

Format	How it heats	Typical feel	Room requirements	Best for
Traditional dry sauna	An electric or wood heater warms rocks and the air	Hot, dry air, with the option to add water to the rocks for a burst of steam	Insulated wood room, ventilation, dedicated circuit or a flue for wood	Purists, anyone who wants the option of both dry and humid
Infrared cabin	Emitters warm the body directly rather than heating the air to the same degree	Lower air temperature, longer sessions, gentler for many people	Lower power draw than most traditional heaters, still needs proper circuit and clearance	Smaller spaces, gentler heat preference, simpler installs
Steam room	A generator produces steam into a sealed, non-porous room	Very high humidity at a lower temperature, heavy and enveloping	Fully waterproofed room, sloped ceiling, drain, generator space, vapor barrier	Buyers who prefer humidity, and existing bathroom conversions
Outdoor barrel or cabin sauna	Traditional heater in a standalone structure	Full traditional experience, separate from the house	Level pad or footing, weather protection, outdoor-rated electrical or wood flue	Homes without interior space, buyers who want the walk outside as part of the ritual

TRY BEFORE YOU DECIDE

People have strong and unpredictable preferences between dry heat and steam. Someone who loves a steam room may find a dry sauna harsh, and vice versa. Two visits to a facility that has both will tell you more than any amount of reading, and it is the cheapest step in this entire process.

Step 2: Where It Will Actually Go

Measure before you shop. The most common late-stage failure is a unit that fits the room but not the route to the room.

Measure and confirm all of these

- ☐ Floor footprint available, length by width, with clearances the manufacturer requires
 - ☐ Ceiling height, including any ductwork, beams or pipes in the way
 - ☐ Every doorway, hallway turn and stairwell on the delivery path
 - ☐ Whether panels can be carried in flat or must be assembled in place
 - ☐ Floor type and whether it tolerates heat and moisture
Tile, sealed concrete and appropriate vinyl are common. Carpet and unsealed wood are not.
 - ☐ Floor load capacity if the unit is heavy or on an upper level
 - ☐ Distance to the electrical panel
 - ☐ Proximity to a shower or a place to cool down
 - ☐ Whether a floor drain exists or can be added, if you are considering steam
 - ☐ Adjacent walls and what is on the other side of them
 - ☐ Ventilation path, both intake and exhaust
 - ☐ Whether the space stays reasonably dry and is not prone to flooding
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Step 3: Size It for the People, Not the Room

SIZING GUIDANCE BY HOUSEHOLD USE

Capacity	Typical use	Seating	Consider
One to two person	Solo daily use, small footprint	One bench	Easiest install, lowest power, may feel tight for lying down
Two to three person	Couples, most common household size	One or two benches	The volume sweet spot for home use
Four person	Families, occasional guests	Two-tier benching	Longer heat-up time, larger heater and circuit
Five or more	Entertaining, larger households	Two-tier, wraparound	Significant power requirement, often an outdoor build

- **Buy for how you will use it, not the biggest party you can imagine**

A larger cabin costs more to build, more to run, and takes longer to heat, every single session, for the sake of occasional guests.

- **Decide early whether you want to lie down**

That single preference changes bench length and therefore the whole footprint.

- **Check bench height and tier spacing**

Higher benches are hotter. Two tiers give you a choice of intensity in the same room.

- **Confirm the door swing and glass**

Doors should open outward and never latch in a way that could trap someone. Glass area affects both feel and heat retention.

Step 4: Heater and Power

HEAT SOURCES AND WHAT EACH ONE ASKS FOR

Heat source	Advantages	Requirements	Watch for
Electric sauna heater	Simple, controllable, no fuel handling, timer and remote options	Dedicated circuit sized to the heater, correct clearances, guard rail	Panel capacity, and heaters undersized for the room volume
Wood-burning sauna stove	Traditional experience, works off grid	Flue, clearances to combustibles, local permitting, fuel storage	Insurance implications and fire code requirements
Infrared emitters	Lower power, faster to feel warm, simple wiring in many cases	Still needs correct circuit and clearances	Emitter type and placement matter more than headline wattage
Steam generator	True steam, precise humidity control	Plumbed water supply, drain, waterproof room, generator access for service	Scale buildup and whether the unit has an auto-drain and flush

- **Size the heater to the room volume, not the floor area**

Manufacturers publish a volume range. Uninsulated walls, glass and masonry all push you toward the larger end.

- **Get the electrical requirement in writing before purchase**

Voltage, amperage, single or three phase, and whether it must be hardwired. Give that sheet to an electrician for a quote before you order.

- **Ask about the control**

Digital controls with timers and scheduling make a routine far easier to keep. Confirm whether the control is included and where it mounts.

- **Check for a required guard**

Most heaters need a barrier so nobody can contact the hot surface. It should be part of the kit, not an afterthought.

- **Confirm a high-limit safety cutoff**

Non-negotiable. Verify the unit carries recognized safety certification for your market.

Step 5: Materials and Construction

- **Wood species**

Sauna woods are chosen for low resin content, dimensional stability and how they feel to bare skin. Softer, lower-density woods stay cooler to the touch on benches. Ask what species is used for benching specifically, since it may differ from the walls.

- **No treated or finished wood inside**

Interiors are left unfinished or treated only with products made for sauna use. Ordinary sealants and stains do not belong in a hot room.

- **Fasteners**

Bench fasteners should be recessed or hidden so nothing hot contacts skin, and hardware should be corrosion resistant.

- **Insulation and vapor barrier**

A traditional sauna needs insulation and a properly detailed foil vapor barrier behind the paneling. This is what keeps the heat in and the moisture out of your framing.

- **Steam room surfaces**

Steam rooms need fully non-porous surfaces, a continuous waterproof membrane, and a sloped ceiling so condensate runs to the walls rather than dripping on you.

- **Flooring and drainage**

A washable, slip-resistant, heat-tolerant floor with a drain where the format requires it.

- **Lighting**

Fixtures must be rated for the temperature and, in a steam room, for wet locations. Dimmable low light makes evening use far more pleasant.

Step 6: Ventilation, the Step Everyone Skips

- **Fresh air matters as much as heat**

A sauna needs an intake near the heater and an exhaust on the opposite side. Without airflow the room feels stale and stratified no matter how hot it gets.

- **Follow the manufacturer's vent layout**

Vent positions are engineered with the heater. Moving them changes how the room behaves.

- **Plan for drying after use**

Leave the door open and run any vent for a period after each session. This single habit does more for the lifespan of the wood than anything else.

- **Steam rooms need a dedicated exhaust**

Moisture that is not removed goes into your building. Confirm the exhaust vents outdoors, not into an attic or a joist bay.

- **Watch the surrounding room**

A basement or bathroom that already has humidity issues will not improve. Address that before you add a moisture source.

Step 7: Prefab Kit, Modular Cabin, or Custom Build

THREE PATHS TO A FINISHED ROOM

Path	How it works	Strengths	Trade-offs
Plug-together modular cabin	Pre-built panels assembled in place	Fastest, most predictable, movable, no framing work	Fixed sizes, limited layout options, may not use every inch of an odd space
Precut kit into an existing room	Framing, insulation and vapor barrier are yours; paneling, benching, door and heater come as a kit	Fits the room you have, uses the space fully	Requires a competent builder and correct vapor barrier detailing
Fully custom build	Designed and built on site	Any shape, any finish, integrates with the room around it	Highest cost, longest timeline, most dependent on the builder's sauna experience

Step 8: Permits, Codes and Insurance

- **Assume a permit is needed until told otherwise**

Electrical work almost always requires one. Structures, plumbing and wood-burning appliances usually do.

- **Use licensed trades for power, water and flue**

This protects your insurance position and your inspection.

- **Tell your insurer**

Particularly for wood-fired units and outdoor structures. A short call now avoids a very bad conversation later.

- **Check homeowner association and setback rules for outdoor units**

Placement, height and distance from property lines are commonly regulated.

- **Keep the paperwork**

Permit, inspection sign-off, model and serial numbers, and installer contact all belong in your home records for resale.

Step 9: Ownership Costs and Upkeep

- **Energy per session**
Driven by heater size, room volume, insulation quality and how long you preheat. Scheduling and a timer reduce it substantially.
- **Routine cleaning**
Wipe benches after each use, wash with a mild cleaner appropriate for the surface, and let the room dry fully.
- **Bench and floor protection**
Sitting on a towel every time is the simplest way to keep benches clean for years.
- **Steam generator descaling**
Hard water builds scale. Follow the flush and descale schedule or the generator's life shortens.
- **Rock replacement**
Sauna rocks break down over time and need restacking or replacement on the manufacturer's schedule.
- **Door and gasket checks**
Heat and moisture work on seals and hinges. Check them seasonally.
- **Exterior maintenance for outdoor units**
Roof, exterior finish and the pad or footing, on the same cycle as the rest of your outdoor structures.

Your Decision Worksheet

Format chosen

Traditional, infrared, steam, or outdoor

Have I tried this format in person? Y / N

Location in the home

Available footprint (L x W)

Ceiling height at the tightest point

Narrowest point on the delivery path

Floor surface and whether it is suitable

Number of people, typical / maximum

Do I want to lie down? Y / N

Heater type and required circuit

Main panel rating and open breaker spaces

Electrician quote for the circuit

Ventilation plan, intake and exhaust

Drain available or required? Y / N

Permit required? Y / N

Build path

Modular, precut kit, or custom

Warranty terms on cabin, heater and control

Total installed budget

Questions to Ask Any Supplier

- 1 What exact electrical service does this unit require, and can I have that in writing?
- 2 What is the recommended room volume range for this heater?

- 3 What wood species is used for the benching, and is the interior unfinished?
- 4 Is a vapor barrier included, or is that on my builder?
- 5 What are the required clearances around the heater and to the walls?
- 6 Which safety certifications does the heater or generator carry?
- 7 What ventilation layout does this design require?
- 8 What is included in the box, and what will I need to buy separately?
- 9 What is the warranty on the cabin, the heater and the control, separately?
- 10 How are replacement parts sourced in five years?
- 11 What are the crate dimensions and weight, and how is it delivered?
- 12 What is the realistic assembly time, and does it need two people?

READY TO CHOOSE

See the formats side by side

Traditional cabins, infrared units, steam room equipment and the accessories that make daily use easy. Browse the range with your worksheet in hand and match a unit to the measurements and power you just confirmed.

[Shop the collection at steamroomsaunas.com](https://steamroomsaunas.com)

Important. This guide is general information for planning purposes and is not medical, electrical, construction, or code advice. It does not state prices, brand claims or health outcomes. Heat exposure places real demands on the body and is not appropriate for everyone. Check with a qualified clinician before beginning sauna or steam use, particularly if you are pregnant, have heart, blood pressure, circulatory or neurological conditions, diabetes, or take medications. Never use heat after consuming alcohol, and stop immediately if you feel unwell. Electrical, plumbing, structural and flue work should be performed by licensed professionals in accordance with your local codes and permitting requirements. Always follow the manufacturer's installation and operating instructions. Results vary.