



PLANNING GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

Garden Suite Planning Guide

Everything a Toronto homeowner should know before
building a garden suite

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The Mimico garden suite. A 400 sq ft one-bedroom completed by Metrohomes in six months.

I The opportunity

What a garden suite actually is, and the two reforms that unlocked it for tens of thousands of Toronto homeowners.

What a garden suite actually is

A garden suite is a self-contained residential unit built in the backyard of an existing home. It has its own kitchen, bathroom, and entrance, and is fully independent from the main dwelling. It is not a laneway suite. Laneway suites are a separate category reserved for lots that back onto a public laneway. Garden suites can be built on any lot that meets the City of Toronto's setback and coverage rules, laneway or not.

What garden suites are not: they are not sheds, they are not unregulated secondary structures, and they are not interchangeable with basement apartments. They are fully permitted, fully inspected residential buildings that count toward the housing supply on your lot.

"They are fully permitted, fully inspected residential buildings. Not sheds, not unregulated structures, not basement apartments."



A full kitchen, full bathroom, laundry, and a real bedroom. A complete home in the backyard.

The 2022 bylaw that made them possible

In February 2022, the City of Toronto amended its zoning bylaw to permit garden suites as-of-right in most residential zones. "As-of-right" is the phrase that matters: it means you do not need a zoning amendment, a Committee of Adjustment variance, or a public hearing to build one. If your property and design meet the bylaw's requirements, you apply for a building permit and go.

Before this bylaw, the only practical way to add a second dwelling to your backyard was a laneway suite, and those required lot access to a public laneway, which most Toronto properties don't have. The 2022 change opened garden suites to tens of thousands of homeowners who were previously locked out of backyard housing altogether.

2022

AS-OF-RIGHT
ZONING PASSED

2023

EHON EXPANDED
THE RULES

What EHON 2023 changed

In May 2023, the City passed Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON), which further loosened the rules for backyard density. EHON is best known for allowing multiplexes city-wide, but it also extended what you can build on a lot that already has a primary home, and it clarified the stacking rules for garden suites alongside basement apartments and secondary suites.

The practical effect for most homeowners: if you have a detached or semi-detached home on a typical Toronto lot, you can often combine a garden suite with a basement apartment, giving you a principal home plus two rental units on a single lot. All as-of-right.



II

Does your lot qualify?

Three factors determine eligibility, and a buildable envelope determines what actually fits in your backyard.

How to check if your lot qualifies

Three factors determine eligibility: your zoning designation, your lot dimensions, and the height overlay that applies to your address. You can check all three yourself using the City of Toronto's zoning map, but it takes time and you have to interpret the layer data correctly.

The faster option: our Property Assessment

Run your address through our Property Assessment. It queries the City's ArcGIS data live, pulls your zoning designation, checks the height overlay for your specific parcel, and counts recent garden suite permits on your street so you can see what your neighbours have built. Sixty seconds, no obligation.

metrohomesdesignbuild.ca/assessment

The buildable envelope

By-law 569-2013 reserves 4m between the main house and the garden suite, 1.5m along the rear lot line, and between 0.6 and 3m on each side (scaled to frontage). Everything outside those lines is protected landscape. The rectangle that remains is your buildable envelope: where a one- or two-storey garden suite can comfortably live.

4m

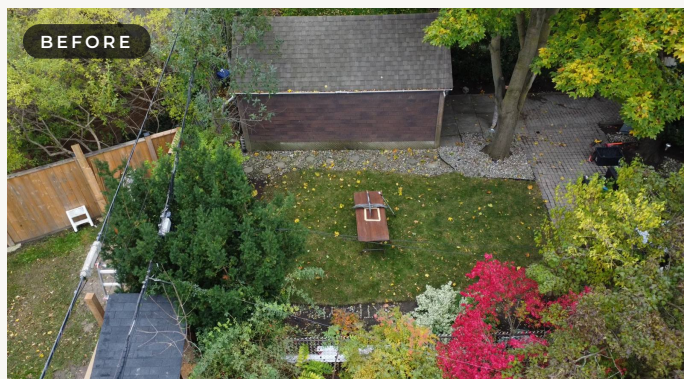
FROM THE
MAIN HOUSE

1.5m

FROM THE REAR
LOT LINE

0.6–3m

SIDE SETBACKS
SCALED TO FRONTAGE



The buildable envelope in practice. The same Mimico rear yard, before and after.

III

Building it right

Design, permit, construction. Nine to fourteen months end to end, and why rushing any phase is where most projects go wrong.

Realistic timelines

From signed design contract to move-in, expect nine to fourteen months for a straightforward garden suite. The biggest variable is the permit review queue at the City. This has ranged from eight weeks in slow periods to six months during peak load. Design typically takes six to ten weeks; construction, once permits are issued, runs four to six months depending on size and complexity.

Rushing any of these phases is the most common reason garden suite projects go wrong. Design shortcuts cost more later in change orders; permit review cannot be rushed (and trying to rush it antagonizes the examiner); and construction quality suffers the moment you try to compress the build schedule past what trades can deliver.

6–10

WEEKS
DESIGN

2–6

MONTHS
PERMIT REVIEW

4–6

MONTHS
CONSTRUCTION

9–14

MONTHS TOTAL
DESIGN TO
MOVE-IN

BUILT BY METROHOMES



Left: Mimico, completed in six months. Right: Danforth, currently under construction.

IV

Hiring a builder

Seven questions that separate builders who know this work from those learning on your dime, plus the red flags to avoid.

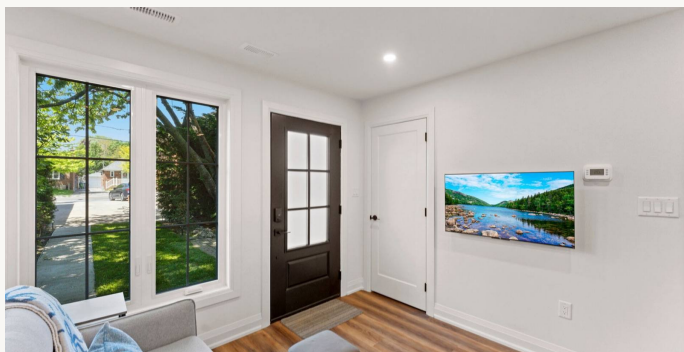
Seven questions every builder should answer

These are the questions that separate a design-build firm that knows garden suites from one that is learning on your dime:

- 01 How many garden suites have you permitted and completed in the last 24 months?
- 02 Are you licensed under HCRA, and can you share your license number?
- 03 Do you provide a single contract covering design, permit, and construction, or do I have to coordinate separate professionals?
- 04 What does your contract say about delays caused by City permit review? Do you absorb that risk or pass it on?
- 05 Can you walk me through one recent project where something went wrong, and how you resolved it?
- 06 What's included in your fixed-price contract, and what is listed as an allowance or exclusion?
- 07 Who is my point of contact during the project, and how often will they update me?

A builder who can answer all seven clearly, without hedging, is someone you can probably trust. A builder who hedges on contract terms, license status, or past project references is not.

“A builder who hedges on contract terms, license status, or past project references is telling you something important.”



Red flags to watch for

- Verbal promises instead of written scope
- Fixed prices that don't break down into hard costs and allowances
- A builder who refuses to name their subcontractors
- A design that ignores setback rules on your specific lot
- A timeline that promises faster-than-realistic permits
- Any pressure to sign a contract before you have had time to review it with an independent party

Garden suites are straightforward buildings in principle but uniquely complicated in execution. They touch zoning, permits, trades, servicing, and the neighbour relationship all at once. The builder you choose should be the one who takes responsibility for all of those things on your behalf, not the one who passes each of them back to you.

Your next step

If you've read this far, you're in the small minority of homeowners who are actually doing their homework before hiring a builder. That's the right order of operations.

Two practical next steps: run your address through our Property Assessment to confirm your lot qualifies, or book an intro call with our team to walk through your specific goals and constraints. Both are free, neither commits you to anything, and both will give you more clarity than another week of research.

Check your lot

See what you can build on your specific property, with live City of Toronto zoning data.

metrohomedesignbuild.ca/assessment

Book an intro call

Walk through your goals, your lot, and your questions with our team.

metrohomedesignbuild.ca/contact





Ready to Explore Your Backyard's Potential?

Run the Property Assessment at metrohomesdesignbuild.ca/assessment to see what you can build on your lot, or reach out directly.

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