

The Ultimate Swing Set Guide For Parents

How to Choose, Set up & Enjoy a Backyard Playset



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Introduction

Congratulations! You've decided to buy a swing set! Now that you've made your decision though, the real journey begins. What makes an outdoor playset a good – no, great – outdoor playset? How do you know what features are most important? What's the difference between brands, styles, and models? What are the spacing and contracting requirements? And just where do you buy such an involved piece of equipment anyway?

There are going to be plenty of questions that come up along the way as you narrow down your options until you find the perfect swing set for you, and that's what this guide is all about. The Ultimate Swing Set Guide for Parents takes an in-depth look at purchasing, installing, and enjoying your wooden swing sets safely and for the long run. Read through our complete guide, and find all the answers you've been searching for.



1.

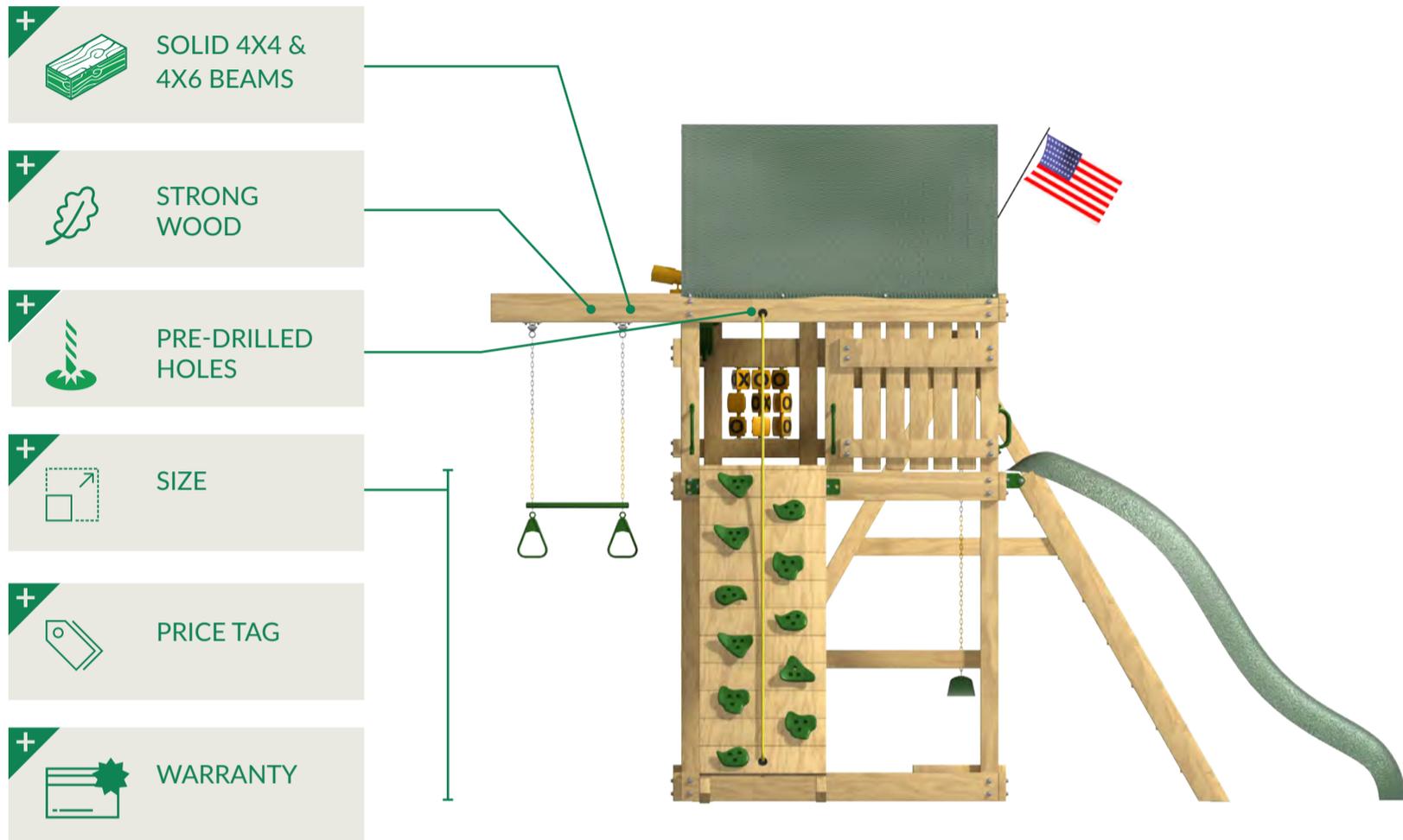


What to look for when purchasing a swing set

You know that you want an outdoor playset, but you have no idea what you should be looking for. Obviously there are different strokes for different folks – some families will require an infant swing, while others will opt for a rock climbing wall. Some will need a larger set, while others will have space requirements that limit their decision. Regardless, there are a few general credentials that no playground set should be without.

Here are the essentials:





Solid 4x4 and 4x6 Beams

Having an impressive-looking outdoor swing set won't do you any good if the structure falls apart on you after a few short years. When looking to purchase any kids' playground piece, you want to make sure that it's made out of solid 4x4 beams for the support structure (i.e. the legs) and A frame. Some playsets are made of 2x4 wood panels, but these pieces will snap and fall apart relatively quickly since they cannot withstand the tremendous pressure that is being placed upon them. You want to make sure that your swing set is being held up by the strongest pieces of wood possible, and the 2x4s simply will not do the job.

In addition, the swing beam (the horizontal beam that holds the swings) should be even thicker. The best size wood for the swing beam is a solid 4x6 beam. These beams will cost more initially, but when you consider the additional expense of replacement parts, the time that goes into finding replacements, and the increased safety of 4x4 and 4x6 beams, you'll find that the price is well worth it.

Strong Wood

Backyard playsets need to be strong in order to last. That's why choosing the right wood for the job is so important. A weak wood (like silver maple, for example) will crack, warp, or fall apart in no time, so invest in something stronger. The most decay-resistant wood you will find is pressure-treated pine.

A word on this recommended, highly resilient wood: Back in the old days when people didn't know the hazards of cigarette smoke, high cholesterol, and sun exposure, wood manufacturers found a brilliant method for making the most solid wood products ever. They injected a chemical mix into the wood, fortifying it against decay, rot, and insect infestation. Unfortunately, decades later, the EPA found that this chemical cocktail was lethally poisonous due to the arsenic component. That's when pressure treated wood became known as the Darth Vader of wood options.

After the pressure-treated EPA made the toxicity information public, the wood manufacturers got together and decided on their own to forgo this more lucrative, stronger option for a healthier combination. Since 2003, manufacturers haven't used arsenic to strengthen their residential wood products.

What this means for parents is simple: Any wooden swing set you buy today that's made from pressure-treated wood is just as safe as any other wood option out there. Plus, you'll get the added benefit of having super-strong wood that combats common problems such as rot and decay.

Pre-Drilled Holes

There are a number of reasons pre-drilled holes are smart. For one thing, it's a real headache drilling all your own holes, and it takes time and a toll on you and your tools. Additionally, when you drill into the wooden beams, you risk splitting or cracking them, compromising their integrity along the way. What's more, when you drill into wood, you will usually leave wood chips along the rim of the hole. These will either need to be sanded (more work for you) or they will cause splinters.

Finally, pre-drilled holes have the bolts recessed into the wood. This is an important safety feature because it alleviates the issue of kids snagging their clothing on bolts and screws that would otherwise jut out of the beams. So pre-drilled holes are more convenient, safer, and smarter all around.

Size

Size is another factor to consider when purchasing wooden playsets. You want the equipment to be large enough so your kids can not only enjoy it now but also for years to come. The height of the deck (that is, the platform or fort at the top of the playset where kids can stand, climb up and down on, and start their descent on the slide), as well as the overall size of the outdoor swing sets need to be considered.

Parents want the deck to be high and wide enough to accommodate children as they grow. Choosing a four-foot deck toddler swing set means your kids will quickly outgrow the structure. Instead, opt for a model with at least a five-foot or six-foot deck. There are jumbo models with seven-foot decks as well, and these will last you well into your kids' teenage years, but only buy one of these if your children are already tall enough to use it safely.

On top of giving you more years of usage, larger decks will also give your outdoor swings a wider swing span, and that's always fun for children. In terms of the size of the actual playset, realize that the larger structures look more inviting and impressive, and they offer more room for children to play.

Price Tag

The saying "You get what you pay for" is something to keep in mind when shopping for a swing set. When you see swing sets for sale, take a good hard look at the quality of the set and at the price tag: if the deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Wooden playsets take a lot of beatings, between kids climbing on them, tweens bounding down the deck, and the constant exposure to the elements. You need something durable, something that's going to last, and that kind of quality just doesn't come cheap.

You can expect to pay anywhere from \$1500 upwards for a real quality set. If you opt for a cheaper swing set, you are settling for an inferior quality piece, and just realize that it will not give you the kind of long-lasting experience you were hoping for.

Warranty

Finally, make sure your kids' playground equipment comes with a solid warranty. The coverage should last at least 10 years if it's a reliable company. Before you buy, clarify what is covered under the warranty. The terms are generally the same across the board, but it's a good idea to know what's included so there are no surprises later on.

2.



Proper Playground Equipment Installation

Proper backyard playground installation is not only smart, it's essential to the safety of your kids and durability of the playset.



Preparation

Before you get out your tools, make sure the ground is clear of any rocks, twigs, and other impediments. Cut off branches that are too close to or that will hang over the kids' slide, swing, or any other of the swing set accessories. Clear away bushes as well.



Construction

Now you can begin putting your outdoor swing set together. Start by bolting together the legs, one set and then the other. Lay these down on the ground as you are constructing the structure for the safest and easiest maneuvering. Make sure you are using self-locking nuts, electro-galvanized heavy lag screws, and oversized bolts for the sturdiest job.

Next connect the overhead crosspiece to the two legs. This is the longest piece of wood in your playset, and it will connect at the top where the "A" of the two legs meet. The playground equipment is sturdy now, so you can stand it up.

The rest of the installation will vary based on the type of swing set accessories you've purchased. Attach the kids' slides, swings, rock wall, etc. using the same durable bolts and screws as before.



Anchoring

Before you let your kids go and play, you'll need to anchor the playground set for safe playing. There are a few methods you can use:

- **Cement:** Mark the location of each of the legs of the swing set parts. Dig out a hole approximately 22 inches deep and 16 inches wide for each of the leg spots. Attach the metal anchors to each of the legs of the swing set, ensuring that the bolt is at least one inch up on the base of the leg. Now fill in the holes with concrete, but leave about an inch of room at the top. With the help of another person, place the anchor-tipped legs of the swing set into each of the concrete-filled holes, pressing down firmly with each insertion. Also make sure the entire lower half of the anchor is completely submerged in the concrete. Wait at least 24 hours before using your set.
- **Spiked anchors:** If the ground is relatively solid, you may not need to pour concrete. Instead, mark the location of the legs as before, and then twist the anchors into the ground at these spots. Attach the anchors to the legs of the playground set by drilling a bolt through the eye of the anchor into the base of the legs. Cover the exposed bolts with a bolt cap for safety. There are several varieties of anchors, but this is the general procedure for all of them. Swing set kits can come with anchors that have specialized instructions for dealing with that type of anchoring system.

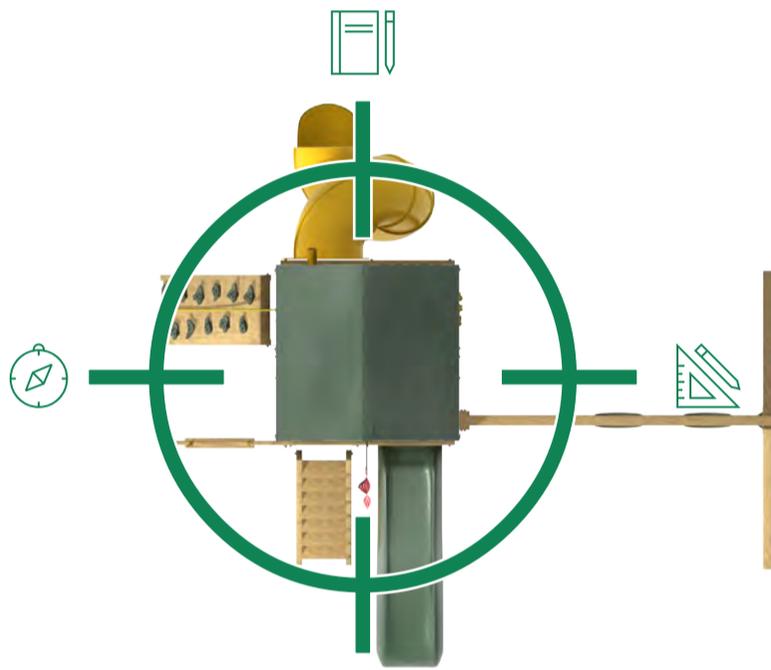
SAFETY NOTE: Unless you have lots of experience in large DIY building projects, we recommend that you hire a professional to build and install your new playset. Most companies that you purchase a swing set from will provide these services for an additional fee.

3.



Proper Swing Set Placement

Before purchasing your swing set, look around your property to find the best placement for the structure. Remember, this is a very large piece of playground equipment, and it will require ample space around the structure to keep things safe.



Measurements

Structures need to be placed with enough distance so that all swing set parts have clearance around the entire circumference. Give yourself at least six feet on all sides to ensure basic safety, and if the kids' swings have longer chains, increase the distance even more. Additionally, swings should be placed eight inches apart from one another and at least eight inches off the ground.

Rails and kids' slides need to have steps and bars that are either less than three-and-a-half inches or more than nine inches apart. Otherwise there is a risk of children getting stuck inside the gaps.

Slope

Slopes are tricky to deal with, but not impossible to work with! While it's definitely recommended to lay your swing set or playset on flat ground, professionals may be able to work with you to install your playset on a sloped area, so long as the slope isn't too inclined. The flatter the surface, the more secure the equipment will be, with a decreased chance of leaning out of place due to gravity.

Proximity to House

For safety reasons, you'll want to be able to see your children, so when choosing the best location for your outdoor swings, consider the perspective from your house. Can you see the children playing from a window or door with ease? Are there obstructions blocking the view? Will you need to go around the house to get to your children if they need assistance?

Consider these possibilities, and plan accordingly, while keeping the proper safety distance in mind as well.

4.



Safe Surface Materials

What you place beneath your swing set is almost as important as the quality of the playset itself. Did you know that the vast majority of playground injuries occur as a result of falling? These casualties can be severe if the ground is not properly padded to cushion the fall. Place a thick layer of the padding underneath and all around the playground equipment for a safe play area.



The Right Material

There are several materials that you can use to cover the surface under your outdoor swing set. Poured-in-place rubber, rubber mats, wooden or mulch chips, and sand are all suitable materials that will cushion the fall and minimize any damage done if a child takes a spill.

Surface Material Amounts

Depending on the material, a layer that's anywhere between three and twelve inches deep will be suitable. Six inches is generally a good practice, though the finer the material, the more you will need to make the area safe.

Keep an eye on the surface material because with time, usage, and weather, the material will wear away and require replacing. An easy way to determine when surface material needs to be refreshed is to draw a small but visible mark on one of the legs of the jungle gym at the very base where it meets the material. When you notice that there is a significant space between the mark and the actual material, it's time to add more.

5.



The Best Place To Buy A Playset

There are basically two options when it comes to buying a kids' swing set: You can go online or you can visit a physical store.



Online Purchasing

Shopping online is a dream. You can sit on your couch, click on links, and find millions of options for whatever you are searching for. You have the benefit of competitive pricing and budget pricing since there's no overhead for these businesses to cover.

Additionally, you won't have to worry about transporting your purchase, which is a major consideration when buying something as large as kids' playground equipment. You can bookmark pages, make comparisons, read reviews, and share links with friends and family to get an outside opinion. These are all benefits in online shopping's favor.

Brick & Mortar Purchasing

Buying something in person is an entirely different experience. You don't have the convenience of comparing multiple brands and models, and you will likely have to pay extra for delivery. The options are more limited since there are only so many stores you can get to, and the decision is generally made more quickly when you've taken the time to go out and shop in person.

The benefit to buying from a store is that you know exactly what you are getting, the exact outdoor playset that you saw in the showroom, and not some cardboard cutout with a load of fine print you should have read.

Even if you know that you're shopping from a legitimate online store, ambiguity still exists. When you are standing in a store, you can see exactly what you're getting. You can touch the material, see the colors, and feel the quality. You can understand the dimensions, the playset accessories, and the mechanisms. So while there aren't some of the other perks that come with online shopping, there is something to be said about experiencing your purchase firsthand.

SAFETY NOTE: We do not recommend buying second-hand playground equipment. The quality of the outside playset is compromised every time you move it, and there is no guarantee as to how the previous owners cared for it.

6.



Safety Measures

Responsible Playing

Play structures can offer endless hours of fun and entertainment, but parents need to remember that this type of playground equipment is also a possible safety hazard. As such, children should not be allowed to play independently before they are physically and emotionally capable of being responsible for their own safety. Playset play should be supervised at all times because accidents can happen in a split second.

Rules for How to Play on the Set

Every family will have their own set of rules of conduct for their garden swings, but here are a few general guidelines for keeping swing set play safe:

- Never walk behind or in front of moving swings.
- No pushing on or near the slide.
- Avoid wearing long necklaces, drawstrings, or hooks that may get caught on the swing set equipment.
- No jumping from the swing while it is in motion.

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