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**These simple steps will help you avoid major blunders**

- 1. Take your time.** Homeowners who have pulled off successful garden project additions or renovations share one trait in common: patience. From start to finish, this quality, more than any other, will help you navigate the rocky waters of construction. Take the time to seek out the very best design professionals and contractors; to experiment with several layouts until you find the perfect one; to unearth exactly the materials you want; and, finally, to do the job right. In the long run, you'll be much happier that your garden room looks just right and functions like a dream, even if the job took a few weeks longer than you had wished.
- 2. Set aside a contingency fund.** Unanticipated costs crop up over the course of a project. Budget for a contingency fund – usually 15 to 20 percent of your construction costs – to cover unforeseen expenses. If you are lucky and don't need the money, you can instead spend it on updated furniture and accessories for your new garden space.
- 3. Find the right people.** The professional you entrust with your garden room project or renovation holds great power in their hands. After all, they will take responsibility for an expensive and personal project. When hiring a pro, carefully consider your choices. You should, of course, choose people who are qualified to coordinate your project. In addition, however, you will need to enjoy a comfortable, productive rapport with them. These relationships are crucial to the success of the job.
- 4. Check references.** No matter what your gut tells you when interviewing prospective contractors, you should also check their references. A few phone calls will help you learn more about the business practices of the people you ultimately hire and will protect you from unpleasant surprises. Ask your design professional for references!
- 5. Insist on an airtight agreement.** Before entering a relationship with any one of the professionals you hire, you need a contract signed by both parties. This will explain the parameters of the job, make clear both parties' expectations, and protect all involved in the unlikely case of a dispute.
- 6. Design for you and your family (pets too).** Don't be swayed by trends that you see in books, magazines and on television. Spend a considerable amount of time composing then revising your 'Garden Wish List'.
- 7. Know what you're getting.** As you select materials for your new garden room or renovation, be certain you know exactly what you are getting before you proceed. Photos can deceive. Save yourself the time and expense of reordering by visiting showrooms and viewing real samples during the planning process.
- 8. Remember the details.** When planning a new garden room or renovation, it is easy to get consumed by the big questions – like whether to build a pool or spa, an arbor or pergola. But long after the workers have packed up their gear and moved on, it is the little things or the details that will bring you the most pleasure and joy. Don't overlook them!
- 9. Get necessary permits.** Normally, permits are not needed for your new garden room or renovation. However, sometimes they are – like if you are building a pool or pool house or in some parts of the city permits are needed for a new irrigation system. The application process is time consuming and can be riddled with red tape. After all, local building codes are designed to protect you, your family, and your neighborhood. Not to mention that sidestepping the authorities could earn you some hefty fines – money that you'd rather spend on those extras – like a wonderful container full of flowers.
- 10. Have fun.** The most important part -it should be fun. Trust the judgment of your design professional. Over the course of the project, you will work very hard making decisions and spend a lot of money on your new garden room or renovation. The process should not wreak emotional havoc. Be certain to relax along the way and enjoy it!