



# *Gutter Buyer's Guide*

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We were once told by a prospective client that *“we’re talking about gutters; not brain surgery!”* While that statement is obviously true, ignoring the importance of ‘those things that collect the water,’ can have some pretty serious consequences to the exterior of your home. In the process of working with Central MN homeowners for 20+ years, we have learned that the average homeowner has very limited knowledge of how a gutter system works, and why they are so often necessary. As a result, we put together this quick resource to assist homeowners, just like yourself, with a brief introduction to gutter systems. It is designed to give you a simple overview of gutters from types, to materials, to items to consider during installation; as well as provide insight to if gutters may be a critical component to your home’s exterior.



Seamless Gutter System with Elbows & Downspouts

## *Types of Gutters*

In its basic form, a gutter is designed to drain water off your roof system and divert it to a specific location for proper drainage. You may find that, dependent upon your location; gutters may or may not be a necessity. Various factors, such as annual rainfall, soil conditions, and landscaping can all contribute to the decision to install a gutter drainage system.

### **SECTIONAL GUTTERS**

There are two types of gutters available to the consumer. A sectional type is usually available at a hardware store, or a big box home improvement store. You will find these pieces are sold in 10 to 20 ft. lengths, and depending upon your installation, a short length like that may be exactly what you need. You will, however, need to add connectors to these pieces in order to splice them together if you use more than one section. Most stores will also have the various other accessories that are needed to complete the project. You will need end caps, corner pieces (miters) drop outlets, and some way of attaching this product to your house. (Don’t worry about the terms right now, I will attempt to explain what they are and what they do later in this booklet.) This type of gutter system is a fairly simple project for your average DIY homeowner. (It should be noted that the same “average DIY homeowner” may be intimidated by the elevated heights necessary to complete this project. If there are any concerns, immediately consult a professional.)

The biggest drawback of sectionalized gutters is the connectors that were mentioned earlier. These seams create a significant opportunity for leaks, and continual maintenance. It is not a matter of “if,” but when they will leak. Northern climates tend to experience a leak sooner than southern climates because of continual freeze/thaw cycles and the expansion of ice in the seams.

## SEAMLESS GUTTERS

The other type of gutter is a seamless product. This system is manufactured on site, and because of that, is not a DIY project. The professional will utilize a large truck or trailer to produce the product, at any length necessary, right in your driveway. The noticeable difference is a much cleaner installation with no seams or splices, thus significantly reducing the opportunity for leaks.



Seamless Gutter

## *Materials*

Sectional gutters are manufactured in vinyl, aluminum, steel, copper, and even wood. Seamless gutters cannot be produced in vinyl or wood, but are available in aluminum, steel and copper.

### VINYL

Vinyl is great for a DIY project, and, as mentioned can be found at any home improvement center or hardware store. Vinyl is an easy product to work with. It is simple to cut, configure, and alter if needed. It is, however, very susceptible to brittleness from intense sun rays, and extreme temperature changes. Vinyl gutters have a **very limited lifetime**, but will be your least expensive initial option.



Sectionalized Gutter; A Simple DIY Project

### ALUMINUM

Aluminum gutters can be a sectional or a seamless type product. The product will cost more than the vinyl alternative, but will not experience the brittleness and limited lifetime associated with plastic gutters. However, please keep in mind that aluminum gutters are also susceptible to denting, and expansion and contraction. The later is a significant issue when considering an aluminum seamless installation. Aluminum sectionalized gutters can still be a DIY project, however, may require more knowledge and tools than the average home owner has.

### STEEL

Steel gutters can also be sectional or seamless. The strength of the product is a huge asset. This becomes important in northern climates where snow and ice can decimate a weaker product. It is extremely important that you research the steel option. Without proper “rust-proofing” this alternative will not be a long term answer for you. Seamless steel gutters are not subject to the expansion and contraction issues that are bothersome on the aluminum product.

## *Selecting a Gutter System*

When considering a new gutter system, the home owner must take into account many relevant issues.

- Will the new system aesthetically enhance the curbside appearance of the house?
- Does the area experience extreme temperature?
- What is the average rainfall for you location?
- Will heavy snow and/or ice create issues for the gutter system?
- Do you have landscaping issues to avoid?
- Are there troublesome drainage areas?



Gutter System with Special Angled Miter Corners

It is imperative that the home owner address any, or all of the above referenced issues. A consumer cannot make an educated decision without proper research.

## *Selecting a Gutter Contractor*

Even more important than the product is the company that you will eventually select to perform the installation. Gutter contractors, similar to the roofing industry, can be plagued with fly by night unprofessionals. The gutter industry is mostly unregulated, therefore, anyone with limited knowledge, some tools, a cell phone and some business cards can suddenly become an expert at draining water away from your house. Scary, isn't it?

***Take the time to meet with the contractor.*** Do not allow that person to simply slide a bid under your front door. Ask for references, demand a written bid, and most importantly require a certificate of insurance. If the person you are dealing with is a fast talking salesman, or cannot provide you with the information that I mentioned, simply thank them for their time, and look for someone else.

***Many companies opt to have their installations completed by a subcontractor.*** While this option can be a cheaper alternative, it leaves the homeowner with terrible exposure for service, and also liability. Ascertain that the company you select has their own employees providing the installation.

## *Gutter Terms*

*Listed below are some terms that you should familiarize yourself with. It will assist in your education of project.*

### **DOWNSPOUT**

The pipe that carries the water from a gutter down to the ground.

### **DRIP EDGE**

Typically a piece of metal that rests under your shingles, and has a unique “L” shape that fits over your fascia board. (Its purpose is to prevent water from wicking back up over the fascia, and eventually rotting out that board.)

### **FASCIA**

The flat surface directly below your roof line. In layman’s terms, the vertical piece of wood that attaches to the end of the roof rafters.

### **FASCIA FILLER**

Some homes are built with a fascia that is two pieces, and is stepped down from the roof. If that is the case, sometimes the gutter contractor will need to fill in that area so the gutter will sit flat against something to support the load necessary to carry water and/or ice in the gutter.

### **FLASHING**

Any metal used to extend the drip edge. On longer runs of gutter, it may be necessary to install some flashing, as the end of the gutter run that accepts the flow of the water, may need to be lowered below the drip edge to allow for drainage.

### **GAUGE**

The thickness of the metal component used to create the gutter system. Steel is measured by gauge, and aluminum is measured by a mil. The “bigger” the number in a mil format, the thicker the metal. Conversely, the “smaller” the number in a gauge unit the thicker the metal.

### **INSTALLATION BRACKET**

The metal piece that is concealed inside of the gutter that supports the gutter system. Some companies still use a long nail (*spike and ferrule*) to puncture the front of the gutter to install. The Spike and Ferrule system should be avoided.

### **MITERS**

The corners on the outside or inside of a gutter run. They can be at a right angle, or could be less.



Spike/Ferrule System



90 Degree Inside Miter

## *Quick Gutter FAQ*

### **DO I NEED GUTTERS?**

*Unfortunately, there is no correct answer to this question.* Every potential project is uniquely different and many aspects will directly influence the factors used in making a decision.

- Is your lot adequately sloped to remove water?
- What is the condition of the landscaping around the house?
- Have you had issues with water intrusion?
- What are the soil conditions for the site?
- What are your roof lines like?

As you can see, there are many different perspectives that should be considered. Obviously, if you are having water intrusion problems, you need to consider gutters. However, homeowners in general should give strong consideration to the above referenced questions to make an educated decision.

### **CAN I INSTALL GUTTERS MYSELF?**

As a qualified do it yourself homeowner, you would be able to install the sectionalized gutters (see Types of Gutters), but would need to secure the services of a professional for a seamless system.

### **HOW DO I FIND A RELIABLE CONTRACTOR?**

*The process is initiated by education.* An education and informed consumer can make a much more logical decision than one that is emotionally involved. Do your homework and the process will be fairly uneventful: skip the homework, and you may be surprised. (See Selecting a Contractor)

### **HOW CAN I TELL IF MY EXISTING GUTTERS ARE NOT WORKING?**

*The key to a functioning gutter system is drainage.* Fortunately, areas that are not working correctly will leave tell tale signs of failure.

- During the rain shower, do you hear water splashing to the ground?
- Is it pouring over the sides of your existing gutter system?
- Do you notice drips at the seams of your sectionalized products?
- After the rain, do you notice areas of washout, or puddling in and around your landscaping?

All of the above are signs of issues. The problem may have a simple solution, or it may be time to consult a professional. Your comfort level with inspection of the problem, will indicate your necessary next step.

*For answers to specific questions, feel free to contact us. We have been serving south central Minnesota since 1967, and would be happy to assist you.*



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