



The Only Fiberglass Pool Buying Guide You'll Ever Need!

By Marcus Sheridan and Jason Hughes

Hello, and thanks for taking the time to visit our site and download our buying guide. After working with around 700 customers over the past 12 years, we're pretty familiar with the questions that most folks have when considering the purchase of an inground fiberglass pool.

So we've tried to answer, in as concise a language as possible, the following five questions:

1. **How Do I Find the Right Pool Shape?**
2. **Which Options and Accessories Should I Consider?**
3. **Should I Consider a DIY Fiberglass Pool Installation or Use a Contractor for My Installation?**
4. **How Do I Find a Reputable Pool Contractor?**
5. **How Can I Insure I'm Getting a Fair Price?**

It's our hope that the following information will empower you to make an informed decision regarding the great investment you're about to make and that the dreams of fun and relaxation you have for your backyard might become a reality.

Question #1. How Do I Find the Right Pool Shape?

This is a question that may be difficult for pool shoppers to answer. Often times, there is not one definitive choice as to which shape best fits your needs.

But before delving into this question, it's critical to understand two things about fiberglass pool dimensions:

1. The measurements given by the manufacturer are taken from **outside edge to outside edge** of the pool. So a freeform pool that is called a 16'x40' is actually only that dimension at its **widest and longest points**.

2. Also, all fiberglass pools have a **6" wide structural beam** around the top of the pool, and manufacturers include that in their measurements. So a 16' x 40' fiberglass pool will actually be closer to 15' x 39'. As a general rule, **take one foot off the length and width to find the actual water's edge measurements.**

Ok, back to finding the right pool shape. Two questions you might want to consider are:

1. **Which is more important to me, curve appeal or play area?**
2. **What are the existing architectural themes of my home and landscape?**

Curve Appeal vs. Play Area

How much swim space do you need?

First, consider how you might use the pool. Activities like games and wrestling with lots of adults or kids on a regular basis will obviously require more space. However, you may be inclined to opt for an elegant curvy design because you will actually "use" the pool more out of the water than in....which is often the case.

But here's what you really need to know: **curves typically equal less swim space.** The amount of lost swim space depends on the design. Some free form fiberglass pool designs sacrifice tons of space as a consequence of their serpentine shape. However, there are shapes on the market that strike the perfect balance between curve appeal and liberal amounts of space.

Obviously, to get the most open swim area go with more of a linear design like a rectangle, but be sure to look at the step and seat configuration in the pool. Some designs have rather large and bulky steps and/or seats that can cut into play areas. This can either be a help or a hindrance depending on your needs.

Architectural Continuity

With regards to achieving a happy marriage between the pool area and the existing features of the property keep in mind that rectangular pools, as well as Roman-end pools, typically communicate more of a formal feel. Curved or free form pools come across as "natural" or even whimsical if desired, depending on the setting.

Need help finding the right pool for you? Check out our Pool Designs Page (<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/pool-shapes-0/>), or if you live in Virginia or Maryland and would like our input just click here (<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/-contact/service/>) to contact us directly and we'd be glad to help you find a design that meets your needs.

Now let's talk about the Depth of the Pool.

The most ideal depth for anyone NOT getting a diving board is roughly around 3' or 4' in the shallow end and 5' or 6' in the deep end. **Anything deeper is much, much less functional and will eliminate many**

activities (eg, volleyball). This depth should have a gradual fall, and not a “hopper,” or sharp slope. Such slopes can be dangerous for little ones and are **worthless when it comes to play**.

Take it from someone who grew up with two pools, both 8’ deep with diving boards. The pools were great, but two-thirds of the space was totally wasted. Games, wrestling, or anything other than simply jumping off the diving board was virtually impossible.

Look, 5’-6’ water depth gives you the best of both worlds. You can still shallow dive off the sides in the deep end (don’t sue me, I’m not condoning any illegal or unwise diving here) and you still have full use of the pool for games or simply relaxing in the cool water if that’s your thing. Plus if you’re a floater (raft user) than it really doesn’t matter anyway.

Step Location in Fiberglass Pools: How Important is it....Really?

Many folks get hung up on the step location in fiberglass pools. They feel it’s critical to have the pool steps facing the house, patio, gate, or other feature. Fair enough, but let me ask you a simple question:

Have you ever purchased a home based on how close the staircase was to the front door, garage, or bathroom? A pool is no different. After working with around 700 fiberglass pool customers I have yet to have a single one mention step location as something that they either love or hate after owning the pool for some time...turns out that in the vast majority of cases, it just doesn’t seem to matter all that much. Please take this into consideration if you find a fiberglass pool that is the perfect size and shape for you but the steps aren’t exactly where you would like.

Question #2: Which Options and Accessories Should I Consider?

Ok this is going to be a crash course in Pool Options. We’re going to cover:

- Decking
- Coping
- Pool Fence
- Pool Color
- Waterline Tile
- Pool Lighting
- Cascades and Water Features
- Automatic Vacuum Cleaners
- Salt Water Chlorinators
- Pool Covers (automatic, safety, standard winter, solar)
- And finally Heaters

Decking

We started with decking because other than the actual pool design, there is no other component that will influence your overall aesthetics more than the pool patio.

How Much Patio Do I Need?

Typically speaking, **most folks need between 600 and 900 square feet of patio around a pool**...enough room for a table and chair set, some chase lounges, and to comfortably walk around the perimeter of the pool. If you're planning to install the pool next to an existing patio or deck, you can probably get by with less. If you're planning to accommodate large groups of people, or incorporate other elements such as an outdoor kitchen, you'll likely need more.

Overview of Popular Pool Patio Materials

Before we get started, here are a few important points that you may not hear from anyone else regarding concrete as a patio product.

Note regarding concrete: It cracks...no exceptions. As concrete cures it shrinks and pulls itself apart. Control joints are installed to attempt to force the concrete to crack in neat, straight lines...sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. The only way to guarantee no crack is get no concrete (sounds blunt, but better to find out now than later).

Note regarding concrete and color: it's a crap shoot. Adding color to concrete is not an exact science and our experience, even when doing everything "by the book", is that a certain percentage of the time the color will not turn out as expected. Just keep that in mind if you're considering stamped or colored broom finish concrete.

Broomed/Brushed Finish Concrete

This is the standard patio material and finish included with most inground pool packages because it is extremely durable, low maintenance, and economical. It typically costs between \$6 and \$8 per square foot. To achieve the best look, cantilevered coping should be poured in conjunction with the broom finished pool deck to cover the 6" wide fiberglass structural beam we discussed earlier. Would you believe some builders actually leave this exposed?

Stamped Concrete

Stamped concrete is poured then stamped with patterned finishing mats that leave impressions in the concrete causing it to look like slate, natural stone, brick, or other textures. It is often colored in a two-step process that gives definition to the varying relief of the surface. Stamped concrete needs to be sealed to bring out the vibrant colors, but this does require more long term maintenance as sealer will need to be re-applied every two to three years. Stamped concrete is also more prone to cracking because the surface is weakened to a degree by the pounding that occurs during the stamping process and because many of the impressions left in the concrete can cause it to crack outside of the control joints discussed earlier. Stamped concrete typically costs between \$9 and \$16 per square foot depending on the region of the country.

Concrete Pavers

Pavers are made of concrete and interlock together to provide a flat, uniform, and beautiful surface that is wonderful for pool patios. They do not crack, the color is much more predictable, and if there is ever a plumbing problem beneath the patio, they can simply be pulled up and re-installed. Concrete Pavers come in wide range of colors and patterns. There are also many patterns and sized to choose from. Concrete pavers typically cost between \$12 and \$19 per square foot.

Natural Stone

Another beautiful option for pool decks is natural stone. The stones are typically either left in their natural random shape or cut and installed in a rectangular fashion. Natural stone can either be dry-set or mortared into place, each application giving its own look and feel. Natural stone typically costs between \$25 and \$90 per square foot depending on the cost and availability of the stone.

Coping

We touched on **cantilevered concrete coping** earlier as the best and most budget friendly way to pour concrete around a fiberglass pool. Another alternative is **Paver Coping** (also called brick coping). This product has bull-nose or rounded edge and comes in a variety of colors and sizes. This coping is installed on a fiberglass pool by first pouring at least 12" of concrete flush with the top of the pool which locks the pool into place and provides the surface for the coping to rest on. The brick or paver coping is then applied to the top of the pool either with mortar or with an adhesive. Paver Coping typically costs between \$29 and \$45 per linear foot.

Pool Fence

The most popular pool fence on the market today is made of **powder coated aluminum**. This sleek looking low maintenance product is perfect for pool projects where a privacy fence is not a requirement. The typical color is black, but white, green, and copper colors are also available. Aluminum fence typically costs around \$28-\$45 per linear foot.

PVC fence is also a viable option around pools, especially when a six foot tall or higher fence is needed. It is also relatively low maintenance and durable. PVC privacy fence typically costs between \$35 and \$50 per linear foot.

Wooden and chain link fence are by far the most budget friendly options. Wood requires much more maintenance than aluminum or PVC. With chain link fence, be sure to check your local fence codes because the standard size diamond openings do not pass in most areas. Wooden and chain link fence can cost between \$15 and \$25 per linear foot.

Pool Color

Let me say here that we almost always recommend colored pools. Adding color to the surface of the fiberglass not only adds quite a bit to the pool's appearance, but it also serves a functional purpose. White pools tend to show everything (dirt, debris, leaves, etc.). Also, white pools, just as you would find if you owned a white concrete pool, tend to have discoloration issues over time.

Typically the discoloration comes in the form of some type of brown spotting or streaks. The stains can usually be removed, but they are a pain nonetheless. In the past, your only color with fiberglass pools was white. Because of this lack of selection fiberglass pools were labeled "ugly" and "bathtub" looking. Fortunately, virtually all fiberglass pool manufacturers offer colored pool finished today. Some builders include colored finishes in their basic price, but some charge as much as \$2,500.

Waterline Tile

Waterline, or perimeter tile, on a fiberglass pool is actual ceramic or glass tile that is adhered to the surface of the pool with a specially formulated silicone product. The tile is grouted with a silicone product as well, allowing the tile to flex and move with the pool shell.

Even though the number of tiled fiberglass pools has decreased with the advent of colored pool finishes, the main benefit of tile continues to be its aesthetic appearance. It can accent the waterline very nicely and make the perfect transition between pool and deck. But unlike a concrete pool, waterline tile is not needed to keep the waterline free of staining. It is merely for aesthetics, and with a price tag of \$2,000-\$2,500 it isn't cheap. Another drawback is that waterline tile will eventually break down and/or fall off, usually within seven to ten years and at a higher cost of replacement.

Pool Lighting

The vast majority of lights installed in fiberglass pools today are low voltage lights like the Pal 2000. As one of the first in the industry to embrace this product, we have found it to illuminate the pool well and stand the test of time. Colored LED bulbs are available that allow you to change colors with the simple flip of the light switch.

These lights come encased with a cord long enough to extend above the water level so the bulb can be changed easily without lowering the water level in the pool. These lights typically cost between \$450 and \$900.

Cascades and Water Features

I am a big fan of water features in swimming pools. The problem that some people have with water features is that they try to achieve a masterpiece of beauty and it comes out looking really cheesy. As a general rule, less is more.

Several types of water features include:

- Simple cascades (\$800-\$1400)

- Elevated poolside walls with water spouts, cascades, or spillways (\$4000-\$15,000)
- Natural water features utilizing boulders and/or landscaping(\$2,500-\$20,000)
- Deck jets that spurt a stream of water from the patio into the pool(\$1,500-\$3,000)

Hot Tubs/Spas

Inground vs Above Ground Spas

I'll keep this one short and sweet. In terms of performance, above ground spas blow inground spas out of the water in every category: jetting, seating, efficiency, etc. and are a fraction of the cost. The average above ground spa costs between \$6k and \$10k and average inground spa between \$10k and \$15k so it becomes very hard to justify the cost of an inground hot tub unless it is utilized for its aesthetic value. Inground spas, when incorporated properly into a design can serve as a gorgeous water feature by implementing spill ways, lighting, and other features.

Automatic Vacuums

The number of automatic vacuums available on the market has increased exponentially just in the last five years. Where there were once only about 3 or 4 options, now there are about 50. Automatic vacuums range in price from about \$400-\$2500, and vary in their effectiveness as well. The three main types of automatic vacuums are suction-side, pressure-side, and robot cleaners. We tend to gravitate toward the robotic cleaners because they are a stand-alone unit that does not require additional plumbing or booster pumps which can fail over time. We typically suggest not getting an automatic cleaner with a new pool, simply because fiberglass pools are so easy to maintain, most find they don't need it.

Salt Chlorine Generators

In our opinion, and the opinion of almost 600 of our fiberglass pool customers, it just makes sense to have a salt pool; with one exception: pools with automatic covers (discussed later).

Salt Chlorinators work by converting salt, which is dissolved in your pool water, into pure chlorine. Sounds simple, and it is! What you get as a result is great water quality without the harsh side effects typically associated with chlorine pools like burning eyes and strong odors.

Simply maintain the proper salt level in you pool by adding salt directly to the water once or twice a season, test your chlorine on a regular basis, and enjoy your pool. Salt Chlorinators typically cost between \$950 and \$2,500.

Salt Chlorinators and Concrete Pools

Ever seen what salt does to a concrete sidewalk? It does the same thing to the surface of concrete pools. But don't worry, salt has no adverse effects on the surface of a fiberglass pool.

Pool Covers

Most pool packages come with at least a standard cover, although the majority of pool owners will end up with a security or auto-cover for their long term needs. In this chapter I've tried to give you a feel for the good, bad, and ugly aspects of each type of pool cover, therefore allowing you to make an informed decision based on your individual needs. No matter what type of pool you choose, you will likely need a cover for the off-season.

Standard Winter Cover:

Price Range \$75-\$225

Standard covers are made of a "tarp" like material and are held down with water bags. This material only lasts 1-3 seasons before it has to be replaced. One of the other main drawbacks of this type of cover is the fact that it holds very little weight. This cover does a nice job of keeping out sunlight as well as other debris...as long as it stays in place. Standard covers also require a pump, which means that one must be vigilant throughout the off-season as to ensure too much water does not build up on the top, causing the cover to cave in. Not to mention, they're pretty dang ugly.

Security/Safety Cover:

Price Range \$1000-\$3000

About 90% of our customers utilize a security cover. These covers have somewhat of a trampoline appearance, with spring-loaded straps connected to the cover, and anchored into the concrete, to hold it in place. There are two main types of security covers: mesh and solid. Mesh covers allow water to pass through, thus eliminating the need for a cover pump. This means a virtually maintenance free pool cover...yeah! The downside is that it also allows sunlight through, which means algae growth. But the beauty of fiberglass pools is that the pool will clear up in no time in the Spring. Mesh covers typically last 10 to 15 years and cost about 30% less than solid covers.

Solid covers, on the other hand do not allow any light through so the pool is typically cleaner when opened in the spring. However, because water accumulates on the cover, a cover pump is needed and will require a watchful eye over the course of the winter to insure it continues to function properly. These covers typically last 6 to 10 years.

Automatic Covers:

Price Range \$6,500-\$15,000+

Automatic covers come in many forms, and this is the reason for their broad price range. Their three biggest benefits are that they keep out debris, they are wonderful solar covers, and they offer constant protection against unwanted guests/swimmers.

The downside, however, is that the cover fabric will typically last between 5 and 8 years at a replacement cost of \$4k to \$6k. Plus, because auto covers slide in a track that runs the length of the pool, freeform pool shapes require the tracks to be installed on top of the patio, which is very unsightly. Consequently, most folks feel limited to a rectangular shaped pools which allows the tracks to be hidden under the pool coping. Finally, the biggest issue with automatic covers is their propensity to break down. If this happens with the cover closed, no one will swim that day.

So, are automatic pool covers worth the investment? We feel that in most cases, especially considering their incompatibility with salt chlorinators, it's very difficult to justify the expense. However, even though they are in the minority, there are certainly situations where auto covers can and should be used.

Solar Covers

Solar covers work exceptionally well for one thing: extending the swim season. They simply retain the heat during the night that the pool absorbed during the day. On average, the use of a solar cover will extend your swimming season about 4-6 weeks, 2 to 3 weeks on each end of the season.

So why doesn't everyone use solar covers? Because they're a pain to work with. Reel systems are the best way to remove and re-install the cover, but they span the width of the pool and take up a ton of space.

One common misconception about solar covers is that they are effective at keeping debris out of the pool, not so. Sure the stuff does collect on top of the cover, but you still have to take the time to remove it or it all ends up in the pool anyway. It's just as fast to vacuum the pool. A solar cover typically costs between \$100 and \$250, and the reel system \$350-\$600.

Pool Heaters

Ok, were going to cover the two most common types of pool heaters on the market today: Natural Gas/Propane Heaters and Heat Pumps. As a general rule, pool heaters are only used during the beginning and ends of the swim season.

Natural Gas/Propane Heaters

These heaters burn natural fuel to heat the water. They do require hookup to a fuel source as well as electricity to operate. They typically cost \$2,200-\$3,000 plus the cost of gas and electrical hookup.

Pros:

- Heats the water very rapidly
- Heats the water regardless of outside air temperature
- Initial cost of unit relatively low

Cons:

- Grossly inefficient
- Very high cost to operate (as much as \$300-\$800/month)

Heat Pumps

Swimming Pool heat pumps work on the same principle as heat pumps for a home. They condense the heat from the outside air to heat the water. They require electrical hook-up, which because of the amp draw of the units, will cost more than the cost of the natural gas/propane heater. Heat Pumps typically cost from \$4k-\$6k.

Pros:

- 75% more efficient than lp/ng heaters
- Low operating cost (usually \$50-\$100/month)

Cons:

- Higher initial cost
- Only works when air temperature is approx. 55 degrees or higher
- Heats slowly (give it 2-3 days to get to temp)

We find that about 19 of 20 of our customers who install heaters choose heat pumps simply because of their dependability and low operating cost. Basically, if you want absolute control of your pool temperature year round with no concern of fuel cost, go with the lp/ng heater. If you're looking to extend your swim season at the lowest cost, a heat pump is probably for you.

Question #3: Should I Consider a DIY Fiberglass Pool Installation or Use a Contractor?

One of the initial questions many people have when first considering an inground fiberglass pool is whether to install the pool shell themselves or have a contractor install it for them. Without a doubt there are major advantages and disadvantages to each approach. Let's take a look at them:

DIY Install (Self Install)

Advantages:

- Significant Cost Savings
- Flexible Time Frame/Start Date
- Total Control of Every Aspect of the Project

Disadvantages:

- Knowledge of Excavation/Construction Required
- Substantial Time Investment for the Homeowner
- May Effect Fiberglass Pool Manufacturer Warranty

Contractor Install

Advantages:

- Significantly Less Headache, Hassle, and Stress Than Installing Your Own Pool
- Quicker Construction Time (Typically)
- Contractor Warranties the Installation

Disadvantages:

- Higher Cost
- Have to Work with Contractors Start Date Which Could Be Delayed During Peak Season

Other Questions People Typically Have About DIY Fiberglass Pool Installations:

How Long Does a Typical DIY Install Take?

The answer to this question greatly depends on the person doing the installation, but most DIY'ers should plan on anywhere from one to two weeks for the pool shell installation phase of the project where most experienced pool contractors can do it in two to three days. The total DIY project including pool install, patio, and fence work could take anywhere from six to twelve weeks.

In comparison, a turn-key installation with a well ran pool company should take anywhere from three to six weeks for a typical project.

How Much Money Will I Save With a Typical DIY Fiberglass Pool Installation?

On average most people will save somewhere between \$6,000 and \$12,000 installing their own pool shell verses having a contractor do it for them. There could be significantly more savings depending on the other phases of the project, who does them, and how much savings are involved there.

What Resources Are Available To Teach Me Aspects of the Installation Process I'm Unfamiliar With?

In the past, Fiberglass Pool DIY'ers had two resources to rely on to teach them how to install the pool:

1. Inadequate installation guides provided by the fiberglass pool manufacturers which consist of several pages of vague general guidelines and virtually no detail.
2. Youtube videos showing fiberglass pool installations which are designed to sell viewers a pool, not teach them how to install one.

This means that DIY'ers have virtually been on their own with regards to learning how to install their own pool, which is very unfortunate for the following reasons:

- Many capable people have made mistakes that would have been avoided if they only had knowledge of the installation
- Many people who could install their own pool have chosen not to because of the lack of good information that would teach them the parts of the process they are unfamiliar with
- Knowledge of quality installations has always existed with reputable installers, but they have always been unwilling to share it with the world, until now...

DIY Fiberglass Pools: The Ultimate Video Guide!

As a result of this lack of good information regarding fiberglass pool installations, two types of people contact us at River Pools on a regular basis:

1. **People attempting to install their own fiberglass pool** who have either hit a road block in the construction process and are unable to complete the work themselves or who have made significant mistakes and seek solutions.
2. **People who have hired a contractor to install their fiberglass pool** only to experience substantial problems during the construction process that could have been avoided if they only understood more about the installation process, what to expect from their contractor, and what questions to ask.

The tragedy is that these problems could be easily avoided with one simple thing: a better understanding of the fiberglass pool installation process.

This is what inspired Jason Hughes, one of the owners of River Pools, to create the most comprehensive fiberglass pool installation guide that has ever existed.

DIY Fiberglass Pools: The Ultimate Video Guide! (www.diyfiberglasspools.net)

This in-depth video guide teaches, through hands-on demonstration every aspect of a world class fiberglass pool installation and is designed to empower both DIY'ers and those who are hiring a pool contractor alike with the knowledge they need to insure their fiberglass pool installation is a success.

This product consists of eight educational sessions with over forty videos and other resources created for the specific purpose of teaching potential pool owners the following:

- Understanding Transits, Grades, and Elevations
- How to Lay-off a Fiberglass Pool
- How to Determine the Elevation of Your Pool
- How to Calculate Dig Depths for Excavation
- An Overview of Soils, Rock, and Ground Water
- How to Excavate for a Fiberglass Pool

- Which Type of Pool Base to Use and Why
- How to Lay-off and Place the Pool Base Foundation of the Fiberglass Pool
- How to Lift, Set, and Level a Fiberglass Pool
- How to Install a Deep End Fiberglass Pool
- Which Skimmers, Return Jets, Lights, and Main Drains to Use and Where to Locate Them
- How to Install Those Fittings in a Fiberglass Pool
- How Pool Filter Systems and Plumbing Works
- How to Plumb a Fiberglass Pool
- How to Plumb the Pump and Filter System
- How to Install a Cascade on a Fiberglass Pool
- How to Heat Bend Rigid PVC Pipe and Other Pool Plumbing Tricks
- Which Backfill Material is Best and Why
- How to Properly Backfill a Fiberglass Pool
- How to Pack the Fiberglass Pool Seats and Steps
- What is Equipotential Bonding and Why is it Critical
- How to Bond a Fiberglass Pool and Components
- How to Maintain Your Fiberglass Pool
- Solutions for Installing Inground Pools on Sloped Yards
- Pool Fence Overview
- How to Budget for a DIY Fiberglass Pool
- Plus Much, Much, More!

To learn more visit: www.diyfiberglasspools.net



DIY Fiberglass Pools: The Ultimate Video Guide!

Question #4: How Do I Find A Reputable Pool Contractor?

If the DIY thing is not for you, this may be the most important chapter of this book. Why? The contractor you entrust your backyard with to install a swimming pool will make or break this whole process. Many people think that the manufacturer of their pool (i.e.- Barrier Reef, Viking, CPC, San Juan, Trilogy, Leisure, Blue Hawaiian, etc, etc.) is the biggest factor in the longevity of the pool. But after consulting with literally dozens of fiberglass pool customers from all around the world over the past decade I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of the fiberglass pool industry. All of my experience regarding contractors can be summed up in these two statements:

A great contractor can install a bad pool, and he will often stand behind it if it fails.

A poor contractor can royally screw up a perfect pool, and will leave you abandoned to fend for yourself.

Frankly speaking, there is little difference between many of the fiberglass pools on the market today, but this is not the case when it comes to contractors. You don't have to look hard on the internet to find horror story after horror story about shady pool contractors. This is a smudge on the face of our industry, and why this is clearly your biggest decision as a consumer. This is also why it's critical to have at least a base understanding of the installation process before your project begins...so you can know what a quality installation looks like and what questions to ask.

Before going into how to find the right contractor, I wanted to discuss two reasons people often choose the wrong contractor: **Price and Installation time**

I'm not sure what makes **some folks lose their mind when the temperature gets up to 95 degrees**, but regardless of how hot it is, or how loud the kids are screaming, please do your due diligence when choosing your pool contractor. Don't simply go with the cheapest price or quickest installation time because despite what you may be thinking right now, you probably will be tempted to do so at some point. Yes, of course these two factors should be considered. You don't want to be gouged from a price standpoint, and you certainly don't want to wait 9 months for your pool, but hasty decisions lead to regret and personally, I wouldn't want to spend \$35,000 to \$80,000 in my backyard only to end up with regret. A few short tasks can help insure you've found the perfect contractor plus protect you against buyer's remorse.

3 Step Process For Finding a Reputable Pool Builder:

Step One: Determine Experience and Stability

Based on my experience of almost 20 years in this industry I have found the following:

2 of every 5 Pool companies fail within their first year.

3 of 5 fail within three years.

And 4 of 5 don't last five years.

That means only one in five pool companies stay in business longer than five years!

Why is this relevant to you? Browse the internet and you'll find real life examples of people whose pools failed after only several years but have nowhere to turn because the pool company they used no longer exists.

The first thing you need to check, when it comes to finding a credible pool contractor, is how long they've been operating under their current name. I make the distinction about current name because it's common for many unsuccessful pool builders to go out of business then re-surface after a year or two under the guise of another business name. More than 5 years in business, especially considering the economic events that have unfolded since 2008, equals a pretty good sign of stability. (River Pools has been in business since January of 2001)

Another question, do they have a physical place of business? Someone working out of their garage or pick-up truck doesn't exactly exude stability. A physical location with offices, employees, etc. is a good sign that a contractor is there to stay. (River Pools office and fiberglass pool depot yard is located in Warsaw, Va)

Step Two: The Interview

Once you've determined that the contractor has been around for some time, it's a good idea to have a conversation directly with them, either on the phone or in person....I'd opt for in person so I can read body language (this could become uncomfortable for the builder).

Ok, you're going to ask a series of questions. Here we go:

Q: How many fiberglass pools have you installed?

This will give you a good idea of their experience specifically with fiberglass. Anything less than 20 pools would concern me. (River Pools, about 700)

Q: How many did you install last year?

This is a set up question. (River Pools, 81)

Q: Can I have all of last year's references?

Ok, here's the deal. If they told you 12 and can only give you 6 references, this means you have a 50% chance of being happy. Sounds like a gamble to me! (River Pools, yes you can have all the references plus 99% of the others from the past 11 years)

Q: Have you ever made a mistake?

If they say no, get up and leave....they're either lying or don't have enough experience. Everyone, and I mean everyone, screws up from time to time. It's how they handle the mistake that counts. (At River Pools of course we've made our share of mistakes)

What was the biggest mistake you have made?

This is a toughy, if the contractor squirms a little bit on this one I wouldn't be concerned, but if they are open with you, it's a great sign. (River Pools, we once Installed same pool 3 times)

How did you handle the mistake, and can I call that customer?

If you don't get a yes on this, there's a great chance they haven't been completely honest with you. (At River Pools we maintained a close and open dialogue with the client throughout the process and stayed on the job until finished to his satisfaction, and yes...he'd love to speak with you.)

Have you ever had a fiberglass pool arrive on your site damaged? How did you handle it? Can I call that customer?

If they've done enough pools, they have had a pool show up in less than ideal condition. The response you want is that they immediately notified the customer and discussed various options with them; rather than simply installing the pool and hoping they didn't notice. (River Pools, unfortunately with a manufacturer that we no longer use, several pools showed up with cracks in the gel cote of the pool and we immediately notified the client and came to a happy resolution. They are also on our reference list.)

Can you point out 3 customers on you reference list where you made mistakes and rectified them?

These are obviously people you want to contact. (River Pools, I'd be happy to point out a lot more than three, and they'd all love to speak with you about their experience).

Step 3: Calling References

Ok, if the proof is in the pudding...this is the pudding. This can be a bit time consuming, but come on, you're about to make a huge investment here!

Here's what you want to do:

- Call old and new references to get a feel for how their current level of service is as well as how their product holds up over time.
- Call references from jobs both close to and far away from the contractor's place of business to determine if geography impacts their level of service.

- Call customers with products as similar to yours as possible. If you're considering a paver patio, call someone with a paver patio for example.
- Call any of the "problem" customers the contractor pointed out.
- When speaking with the references ask what impressed them the most and least about the contractor. Ask if they would change anything if they had to do it over again.

Question #5: How Can I Insure I'm Getting a Fair Price on My Fiberglass Pool and Accessories?

Ok, this buyers guide will be literally read by potential fiberglass pool owners from all around the globe, so there's no way to have a discussion about whether any particular price of a fiberglass pool is "fair". However, what we can do is discuss how you can protect yourself from "hidden costs" which unfortunately are not a rare thing in the pool industry.

What are hidden costs?

Let's look at an example. Your builder has just started excavating the hole for your pool. Naturally, you're very excited about the project starting and the prospect of swimming in the coming days or weeks. But then you get a knock on the door by the contractor asking how you would like to pay the hauling fees for disposing of the dirt. This was never discussed during the entire sales process, and you become irate at having to fork out an additional \$500-\$2,000 you were not planning on.

There are many such scenarios become a reality every day...this is what we're trying to avoid.

Most Common Hidden Costs:

- Dirt Hauling In/Out
- Electrical Hook-up to Pool Equipment
- Fencing
- Landscaping
- Patio
- Drainage work for yard or pool deck
- Retaining Walls
- Tree Removal
- Hitting Ground Water or Rock during Excavation

How to Avoid Hidden Costs:

#1: The Salesperson's Quote Sheet

This should disclose all potential costs and clearly specify what is and is not included in the builder's scope of work. For example, we have at the bottom of our quote sheet the list ascribed above to inform the customer that unless otherwise specified, these things are not included. Plus, we also make them a point of discussion as early in the buying process as possible.

#2: Don't Start the Project Until All Costs are Known

Some pool builders are famous for just giving square footage prices for patio or retaining walls knowing full well that the client has no concept of what the final cost for those options will be. They are more concerned with "closing" the deal than their customer being within a specified budget.

For example, let's say I walk in your backyard and it's obvious that you will need a 3' tall retaining wall that I know will end up costing you around \$12k. To make the price seem lower on the front end, I tell you that you will need a wall and our price is \$35/sq face foot, but that's all I disclose. We do the deal and sign the contract for the pool and patio, leaving the wall for later. But alas, later always comes and you flip out, when after the pool is already installed, I slap you with a \$12k bill. Sounds crazy, but it happens every single day in the world of pools. **Moral of the story: get the wall, patio, fence, electrical, and every other price in writing before construction begins.**

#3: Ask, "What other Potential Costs Are There?"

There are always unknowns going into a project. Ground water or rock could be hit during excavation for example, and there's a chance that could cost you more money. But don't rely on the builder to convey those potential costs to you. Be proactive and simply ask.

Well, That's It!

There you have it. Hopefully you've found this Fiberglass Pool Buying Guide helpful in your quest to find the perfect pool for your home and family.

So now that you're well on your way, you might find some of the links below helpful as you continue to learn more about fiberglass pools:

- **Our Fiberglass Pool Shapes and Sizes:**

<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/pool-shapes/>

- **Our Fiberglass Pool Cost Guide (which is more specific to the Virginia/Maryland area):**

<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/cost/>

- **Swimming Pool Financing 101 (detailed discussion about swimming pool financing options):**

<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/blog/bid/30184/Swimming-Pool-Financing-How-Can-I-Get-a-Pool-Loan-in-2010>

Or you may want to Request a Pool Quote (Va/Md only please):

<http://www.riverpoolsandspas.com/request-a-quote/>

Thanks again and Best of Luck!