

Above-ground pools offer new styles, options

By Tara Marion

As your midwinter blues fade into spring fever this time of year, it's time to start thinking about how you're going to beat the heat this summer.

If you're trying to decide between an in-ground or above-ground pool, you should be aware of the improved versatility and construction of the latter.

Above-ground pools these days are well-built products," said Jeff Bishop, manager of Locey Swim Pool Co., 6625 Lovers Lane. "The quality is excellent."

No diving because of shallow water depth is the obvious disadvantage of an above-ground pool, but at the same time, you won't be diving to dangerous depths in your bank account. "You're going to get just as wet for a lot less money," Bishop said.

If you haven't seen an above-ground pool in recent years, you may not be familiar with its evolution. Extras like an automatic cleaner, volleyball net, basketball hoop, walk-around deck, slide, fiber-optic lighting or even an in-pool fountain can be added to create a fun and attractive setting.

Bishop himself is partial to the fountain, explaining, "I like to open my pool early in the season so I can look at the water and have the fountain going in it. It may be too cold to swim, but I can still enjoy the beauty and sound of the water."

The construction of the above-ground pool has also evolved over the years. Forty-eight-inch walls were once standard in the industry, but over time, 52-inch walls have gained popularity because they offer more of the depth available with in-ground pools. "It's a way to make a pool deeper without having to dig out the ground," Bishop explained.

Not having to dig out the ground is, of course, one of the major advantages of above-ground pools. Mike Hook, sales manager of American Pools Plus Construction, 5859 Sprinkle, explained the installation process. The sod is removed from the area where you're putting your pool and is replaced with two inches of sand.

"Sand protects the bottom of the liner because it sits right on the ground," he said. "You can't put it on regular dirt because rocks, grass shoots and things like that could puncture it."

This non-intrusive installation makes an above-ground pool a temporary fixture, so it does not increase your property taxes as an in-ground pool could.

But when you're ready to sell your home, if buyers are not interested in the above-ground pool, you could take it with you when you move or you could just take it down before putting your house on the market.

There are many things to consider when comparing the advantages and disadvantages of in-ground and above-ground pools.

If you choose to do go with an above ground pool, Bishop and Hook encourage homeowners to consider a few other factors as well.

Two shapes are available: oval and round. If you have a long, narrow backyard, the oval pool is your best bet, but if you have a large backyard, a round one may be a better choice.

According to Bishop, based on the pool size vs. dollars spent, the round pool is the best buy.

He explained that construction costs are higher for an oval pool as more structural support is needed to balance the water pressure.

“On the long, straight walls of an oval pool, you have to have long angle braces or supports to hold the wall flat,” he noted, “whereas in a round pool, the water pressure’s equal.”

Ask your building inspector how close the pool can be to your lot lines and house and whether you need a fence. Since the walls of an above-ground pool are barriers in and of themselves, you may not need a fence—another benefit of this product.

The walls of the above-ground pool also make it easier to keep clean than an in-ground pool.

As Bishop explained, “Leaves and grass clippings along the ground will typically end up in an in-ground pool, but the above-ground wall protects the pool so it tends to stay a little cleaner.

When it comes to maintenance, above-ground pools and in-ground pools are quite similar. They both require a pump, filter, vacuum, test kit and chemicals.

“Basic equipment that you have to have is pretty much the same for every pool,” Hook said.

On the other hand, the structure of an above-ground pool is very different from that of an in-ground pool.

The above-ground pool begins with a base frame. “That’s the foundation for the pool,” Bishop said.

Added Hook, “It stabilizes the whole pool and ties it all together.”

Steel walls are the strength of the pool, and upright posts around the exterior perimeter of these walls support the pool and maintain its shape.

A top frame, which is usually a mirror image of the base frame and also known as a ledge or a sat, “holds the whole unit together and provides the final strength element to it,” Hook explained.

The liner finishes the assembly and transforms the structure into an above-ground pool.

Last but not least, you’ll also need a ladder or steps to get in and out of the pool.

Because of the simple setup of an above-ground pool, both Bishop and Hook agreed that a do-it-yourselfer could erect one in a weekend, but as the old saying goes, “time is money.”

As Hook pointed out, “If a doctor’s thinking of installing his own pool, he’s wasting his money.”