

by James_Dulley

Dear Jim: I want to spend more time outdoors with my family. We get a nice breeze, so a screened room over the patio would be perfect. Also, we will not have to air-condition as much. What options do I have? - Cliff

Dear Cliff: You have the right idea about spending more time outdoors with your family. If the sun is blocked by a patio room roof and there is a nice breeze, you can be very comfortable. Even if this allows you to set the air conditioner thermostat higher for only a couple of hours each day, you will notice lower electric bills.

A lightweight patio room can be built over a deck above the ground level. Notice how its roof lines match the house roof. Photo credit: Americana Building Products

A round screen-only patio room with a three-ply vinyl roof. It is delivered 90-percent preassembled to your home. Photo credit: Kay Home Products This freestanding patio room kit assembles quickly and can be located anywhere in your yard. Photo credit: Kay Home Products It sounds as though what you are looking for is a three-season patio room. Other than in very mild southern climates, these are not designed for heating as are ones with insulated, tight-fitting glass windows and doors. This makes the overall cost much more reasonable than a true year-round room.

Patio rooms are often built over an existing patio as you plan to do. Some very lightweight models can be even be built over a wooden deck. Many insects, such as mosquitoes, fly and do not crawl much. They generally will not come up through the narrow gaps between the wood decking planks.

If your three-season or four-season patio room will be attached to your house wall, as most are, make sure the patio is stabilized. If the deck moves up and down with weather changes and it is rigidly attached to the house wall which does not move, you will have problems. This is particularly true in climates with wintertime freezing temperature.

Many of the patio rooms you will find use single-pane sliding windows with an insulated solid roof. When the windows are fully opened, 50 percent of the walls will be open screening. This is more than adequate for good ventilation. I also installed a venting skylight in my three-season room to help exhaust the warmest air out the roof.

Having windows, instead of 100 percent screening, sometimes provides better ventilation. By just opening certain windows near where you are sitting, you can create a stronger breeze over your body. Mount a ceiling paddle fan in the middle of the patio room for use in the evening when the winds naturally diminish.

A sandwich-style, aluminum skin roof is an excellent choice. The top and bottom skins are painted aluminum with several inches of rigid foam insulation between them. This forms a very strong and attractive structure.

Another low-cost patio room option uses a simple metal frame (round or rectangular) with fiberglass screening and a three-ply vinyl skin. It is very durable, can be set up in minutes and is as large as 220 square feet. It is delivered to your home 90 percent preassembled.

The following companies offer patio rooms: Americana Building Products, (888) 442-2928 www.americana.com; Artistic Enclosures, (800) 944-8599, www.artisticenclosures.com; Craft-Bilt Manufacturing, (800) 422-8577 www.craftbilt.com; Kay Home Products, (800) 600-7009, www.kayhomeproducts.com; and Thermal-Gard, (800) 436-4012, www.thermal-gard.com.

Dear Jim: I currently do not have central air-conditioning so I thought about installing ductless air-conditioning. With the proper instructions, do you think I could install it myself and save some money? - Guy V.

Dear Guy: It is true that installing ductless central air-conditioning is easier than a new ducted system, but I would not recommend you try to do it yourself. Your local codes may require a licensed contractor handle it.

The primary reasons are the possible release of the refrigerant into the air which can harm the environment. Also, the refrigerant pressures must be set properly for efficiency and this requires special equipment.

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