

A FREE GUIDE FROM WELLDRILLINGCOMPANIES.COM

The New Well Owner's Guide

Everything to check, ask, budget, and maintain - before and after you drill a private water well.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- What to check before you hire a driller
- 10 questions to ask any well contractor
- What a well actually costs, and how depth drives price
- Permits, licensing, and water rights basics
- Your first-year maintenance and water-testing schedule
- Red flags that should make you walk away
- Printable checklists you can take to a site visit

Well Drilling Directory is an independent directory, not affiliated with any contractor listed.

General information only - always confirm details with a licensed local contractor and your state's well program.

Welcome to Well Ownership

A private well puts you in charge of your own water supply, which is a genuine advantage and a real responsibility. Unlike a home on municipal water, there is no utility company testing your water, maintaining the equipment, or sending a technician when something goes wrong. That job is yours. The good news is that with a well-built system and a simple yearly routine, a private well is low-maintenance and can serve a household reliably for decades.

This guide pulls together the essentials in one place: what to look at before you hire a driller, the questions that separate a solid contractor from a risky one, what a well realistically costs, the permits involved, and the short maintenance and testing routine that keeps the water safe once the rig leaves. It is grounded in guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the National Ground Water Association (NGWA), alongside national cost data. Wherever a number appears, treat it as a starting point for budgeting rather than a quote for your specific property.

1. Before You Hire: What to Check

Most well problems trace back to decisions made before drilling ever starts. Slowing down here pays off for the life of the well.

- 1. Confirm the driller is licensed.** Most states license or register water well contractors and let you verify an active license online through the state's well program or licensing board. Do this before you sign anything, and make sure the license covers water well drilling specifically.
- 2. Ask for proof of insurance.** A legitimate contractor carries liability insurance and, where required, a bond. Ask to see current certificates, not just a verbal assurance.
- 3. Get more than one quote.** National averages are useful for budgeting, but your real cost depends on local geology and market. Get written estimates from a few licensed local contractors before you commit.
- 4. Look into local water conditions.** Ask neighbors with wells how deep they had to go, whether they hit hard rock, and what their water quality is like. Your state's well-log database often holds records for nearby wells that hint at what you will encounter.
- 5. Understand your site.** Note where your septic system, property lines, underground utilities, and any potential contamination sources sit. Setback rules will dictate where the well can legally go.

2. Ten Questions to Ask Any Driller

Bring this list to every contractor conversation. Clear, specific answers are a good sign; vague or evasive

ones are a reason to keep looking.

- What is your state license number, and is it current for water well drilling?
- Can you show current liability insurance (and a bond, if my state requires one)?
- How deep do you expect to drill here, and what are you basing that on?
- What drilling method will you use, and why is it right for my ground?
- What casing material and diameter will you install, and why?
- Is the pump, pressure tank, and wiring included, or quoted separately?
- Who pulls the permit, and is the permit fee in your quote?
- What happens if you drill a dry hole or have to go deeper than estimated?
- Will you provide a well log and disinfect the well before handover?
- What warranty covers the well and the pump, and for how long?

Rule of thumb

A complete quote should spell out drilling depth, casing, the pump system, permits, and a written estimate before any work begins. If a contractor cannot put those in writing, that is your answer.

3. Cost and Depth Expectations

Depth is the single biggest driver of what a well costs, because most drilling is priced by the foot. The deeper the water and the harder the rock, the more you pay. The figures below are national averages drawn from HomeAdvisor's well-drilling data; your local quotes are what actually matter.

Item	Typical range (national)
Complete residential well (all-in)	\$3,000 - \$9,000; average ~\$5,500
Drilling	\$25 - \$65 per foot
Casing - PVC	\$6 - \$10 per foot
Casing - galvanized or stainless steel	\$36 - \$140 per foot
Pump, installed	\$900 - \$2,500

A few things shift these numbers. **Depth** compounds every per-foot cost at once, so a deep well in hard rock can run well past the averages. **Casing material** matters: PVC is cheaper and corrosion-resistant, while steel costs more but suits certain conditions. **Pump type and lift** raise the pump price the deeper water sits. And **access** for the drilling rig, permits, and water testing all add to the total. Budget a cushion above the headline figure rather than the bare minimum.

4. Permits, Licensing, and Water Rights

Drilling a private well is regulated, and the rules are mostly set at the state and local level rather than federally. Skipping the paperwork can mean fines, a well you cannot legally use, or problems when you sell the home.

- **Permit first.** Most states or counties require a permit before drilling. It typically sets minimum setbacks from septic systems, property lines, and contamination sources, and may specify construction standards.
- **Licensed contractor.** Many states require the well to be drilled by a licensed contractor for the permit and well log to be valid.
- **Well log filing.** After drilling, the contractor usually files a well log (a record of depth, geology, casing, and yield) with the state. Get a copy for your records; it is invaluable later.
- **Water rights.** In some states, especially in the West, groundwater use is governed by water-rights law. Household use is often exempt or permitted, but large or agricultural use may not be. Check your state's rules before assuming unlimited use.

Where to look

Search for your state's "well program" or "groundwater/water well" agency. That office handles permits, contractor licensing lookups, well-log records, and water-rights questions.

5. Your First-Year Maintenance Schedule

A private well is not on any regulated testing schedule, so the responsibility for upkeep is entirely the owner's. The routine is short and predictable. Most of it happens once a year, with a few ongoing checks and a set of triggers that call for action right away.

Task	How often
Test water for bacteria, nitrates, TDS, and pH	At least once a year
Visual check of well cap, casing, and surface seal	Periodically; at minimum yearly
Full professional well-system checkup	Annually, by a licensed pro
Keep the wellhead clear of debris and chemicals	Ongoing, year-round
Update your well log and maintenance records	After every test or repair

The professional annual checkup usually covers a flow test, water level, the pump's amp draw and wiring, and the pressure tank and switch. NGWA is explicit that any maintenance beyond simple cleaning should be left to a qualified water-well professional. Keep the wellhead area clear, make sure the casing sits at least a foot above ground, and make sure the ground slopes away so runoff drains off rather than pooling.

6. Water Testing Essentials

Testing is the one task that protects your household's health directly, and it is easy to let slide because well water often looks and tastes fine even when something is off. Both the EPA and CDC recommend testing at least once a year for four core parameters.

- **Total coliform bacteria** - a signal that surface water, septic effluent, or animal waste may be reaching the well.
- **Nitrates** - often point to fertilizer, septic, or agricultural runoff; especially important where infants live in the home.
- **Total dissolved solids (TDS)** - a rough gauge of everything dissolved in the water.
- **pH** - affects taste and how corrosive the water is to your pipes and fixtures.

Use a state-certified laboratory rather than relying on a retail strip alone; many county health departments offer well testing free or at reduced cost. Test outside the yearly schedule right away if the water's taste, smell, or color changes, after any flooding or nearby construction, after you repair any part of the system, or if there is a known groundwater problem in your area. Depending on local geology, add tests for arsenic, radon, or other contaminants.

7. Red Flags: When to Walk Away

Most contractors are honest professionals. These are the warning signs that should make you pause, ask harder questions, or choose someone else.

- No verifiable license number, or a license that does not cover well drilling.
- Reluctance to provide proof of insurance or a written estimate.
- A quote far below every other bid, with no explanation of what is excluded.
- Pressure to pay a large sum in cash up front before any work.
- No mention of permits, or an offer to skip them to save you money.
- Won't commit to providing a well log or disinfecting the well at handover.
- Vague answers about depth, casing, or what happens if the hole comes up dry.

8. Take-to-Site Checklists

Before you hire

- Verified the contractor's license on the state lookup
- Saw current insurance (and bond, if required)
- Collected at least two written, itemized quotes
- Confirmed who pulls the permit and whether the fee is included

- Asked what happens if the well is deeper than estimated or dry

At handover

- Received a copy of the well log
- Confirmed the well was disinfected
- Got the pump and pressure-tank details and warranty in writing
- Scheduled your first water test

Every year after

- Water tested (bacteria, nitrates, TDS, pH)
- Wellhead and cap inspected; area kept clear
- Professional system checkup booked
- Records updated and filed with your well log

Ready for the next step? When you are ready to drill, repair, or inspect a well, you can compare quotes from licensed contractors serving your area at welldrillingcompanies.com. It is free to use, with no obligation.

Sources: U.S. EPA Private Wells program; CDC drinking-water guidance; National Ground Water Association (wellowner.org) homeowner resources; HomeAdvisor well-drilling cost data. This guide is general information and is not a substitute for advice from a licensed well professional or your state's well program. Costs and rules vary by state, site, and local market.