

A photograph of two construction workers on a building site. They are standing on a wooden formwork structure with numerous vertical rebar rods protruding. The worker on the left is wearing a blue jacket, a yellow hard hat, and a safety harness. The worker on the right is wearing a high-visibility yellow-green jacket, a yellow hard hat, and a safety harness. The background is a clear blue sky. The text 'Glossary Of Construction Terms' is overlaid on the image in white and green.

Glossary Of Construction Terms



Your builder and EcoSun Homes know that when you start shopping for a new home and a new home mortgage, you may encounter some words and terms that are not familiar. This glossary will help you be a better-informed shopper.

Aerator- The round screened screw-on tip of a sink spout. It mixes water and air for a smooth flow.

Aggregate- A mixture of sand and stone and a major component of concrete.

Air space - The area between insulation facing and interior of exterior wall coverings. Normally a 1" air gap.

Amortization - A payment plan by which a loan is reduced through monthly payments of principal and interest.

Anchor bolts- Bolts to secure a wooden sill plate to concrete, or masonry floor or wall.

Appraisal An expert valuation of property.

Apron- A trim board that is installed beneath a window sill

Architect - One who has completed a course of study in building and design, and is licensed by the state as an architect. One who draws up plans.

Area wells- Corrugated metal or concrete barrier walls installed around a basement window to hold back the earth

Assumption - Allows a buyer to assume responsibility for an existing loan instead of getting a new loan.

Astragal- A molding, attached to one of a pair of swinging double doors, against which the other door strikes.

Attic access- An opening that is placed in the drywalled ceiling of a home providing access to the attic.

Attic Ventilators- In houses, screened openings provided to ventilate an attic space

Backfill- The replacement of excavated earth into a trench around or against a basement /crawl space foundation wall.

Ballast- A transformer that steps up the voltage in a fluorescent lamp.

Balusters- Vertical members in a railing used between a top rail and bottom rail or the stair treads. Sometimes referred to as 'pickets' or 'spindles'.

Balustrade- The rail, posts and vertical balusters along the edge of a stairway or elevated walkway.

.Base or baseboard- A trim board placed against the wall around the room next to the floor.

Basement window inserts- The window frame and glass unit that is installed in the window buck.

Base shoe- Molding used next to the floor on interior base board. Sometimes called a carpet strip.

Bat - A half-brick.

Batten- Narrow strips of wood used to cover joints or as decorative vertical members over plywood or wide boards.

Bay window- Any window space projecting outward from the walls of a building, either square or polygonal in plan.

Bearing partition- A partition that supports any vertical load in addition to its own weight.

Bearing wall- A wall that supports any vertical load in addition to its own weight.

Bedrock- A subsurface layer of earth that is suitable to support a structure.

Binder- A receipt for a deposit to secure the right to purchase a home at an agreed terms by a buyer and seller.

Bypass doors- Doors that slide by each other and commonly used as closet doors.

Blankets- Fiber-glass or rock-wool insulation that comes in long rolls 15 or 23 inches wide.

Blocked (door blocking)- Wood shims used between the door frame and the vertical structural wall framing members.

Blocking- Small wood pieces to brace framing members or to provide a nailing base for gypsum board or paneling.

Boom- A truck used to hoist heavy material up and into place. To put trusses on a home or to set a heavy beam into place.

Brace- An inclined piece of framing lumber applied to wall or floor to strengthen the structure. Often used on walls as temporary bracing until framing has been completed.

Breaker panel- The electrical box that distributes electric power entering the home to each branch circuit (each plug and switch) and composed of circuit breakers.

Brick ledge- Part of the foundation wall where brick (vener) will rest.

Brick lintel- The metal angle iron that brick rests on, especially above a window, door, or other opening.

Brick mold- Trim used around an exterior door jamb that siding butts to.

Brick veneer- A vertical facing of brick laid against and fastened to sheathing of a framed wall or tile wall construction.

Buck- Often used in reference to rough frame opening members. Door bucks used in reference to metal door frame. See Window Bucks

Bull nose (drywall)- Rounded drywall corners.

Bundle - A package of shingles. Normally, there are 3 bundles per square and 27 shingles per bundle.

Buy down- A subsidy (usually paid by a builder or developer) to reduce monthly payments on a mortgage.

Cantilevered void- Foundation void material used in unusually expansive soils conditions. This void is "trapezoid" shaped and has vertical sides of 6" and 4" respectively.

Cap- The upper member of a column, pilaster, door cornice, molding, or fireplace.

Cap flashing- The portion of the flashing attached to a vertical surface to prevent water from migrating behind the base flashing.

Casement- Frames of wood or metal enclosing part (or all) of a window sash. May be opened by means of hinges affixed to the vertical edges.

Casement Window- A window with hinges on one of the vertical sides and swings open like a normal door

Casing- Wood trim molding installed around a door or window opening.

Caulking- (1) A flexible material used to seal a gap between two surfaces e.g. between pieces of siding or the corners in tub walls. (2) To fill a joint with mastic or asphalt plastic cement to prevent leaks.

Celotex™- Black fibrous board that is used as exterior sheathing.

Cement- The gray powder that is the "glue" in concrete. Portland cement. Also, any adhesive.

Chalk line- A line made by snapping a taut string or cord dusted with chalk. Used for alignment purposes.

Chase- A framed enclosed space around a flue pipe or a channel in a wall, or through a ceiling for something to lie in or pass through.

Chink- To install fiberglass insulation around all exterior door and window frames, wall corners, and small gaps in the exterior wall.

Chip Board- A manufactured wood panel made out of 1"-2" wood chips and glue. Often used as a substitute for plywood in the exterior wall and roof sheathing. Also called OSB (Oriented Strand Board) or wafer board.

Circuit- The path of electrical flow from a power source through an outlet and back to ground.

Cold air return- The ductwork (and related grills) that carries room air back to the furnace for re-heating.

Collar beam- Nominal 1- or 2-inch-thick members connecting opposite roof rafters. They serve to stiffen the roof structure.

Column- A vertical structural compression member which supports loads.

Combustion air- The duct work installed to bring fresh, outside air to the furnace and/or hot water heater. Normally 2 separate supplies of air are brought in: One high and One low.

Concrete- The mixture of Portland cement, sand, gravel, and water. Used to make garage and basement floors, sidewalks, patios, foundation walls, etc. It is commonly reinforced with steel rods (rebar) or wire screening (mesh).

Concrete board - A panel made out of concrete and fiberglass usually used as a tile backing material.

Condensing unit - The outdoor component of a cooling system. It includes a compressor and condensing coil designed to give off heat.

Conduit, electrical- A pipe, usually metal, in which wire is installed.

Continuity tester- A device that tells whether a circuit is capable of carrying electricity.

Convection- Currents created by heating air, which then rises and pulls cooler air behind it. Also see radiation.

Dado- A groove cut into a board or panel intended to receive the edge of a connecting board or panel.

Damper- A metal "door" placed within the fireplace chimney. Normally closed when the fireplace is not in use.

Dampproofing- The black, tar like waterproofing material applied to the exterior of a foundation wall.

Dead light- The fixed, non-operable window section of a window unit.

Deck, decked- To install the plywood or wafer board sheathing on the floor joists, rafters, or trusses.

De-humidistat- A control mechanism used to operate a mechanical ventilation system based upon the relative humidity in the home.

Disconnect- A large (generally 20 Amp) electrical ON-OFF switch.

Doorjamb, interior- The surrounding case into which and out of which a door closes and opens. It consists of two upright pieces, called side jambs, and a horizontal head jamb. These 3 jambs have the "door stop" installed on them.

Door operator- An automatic garage door opener.

Door stop- The wooden style that the door slab will rest upon when it's in a closed position.

Dormer- An opening in a sloping roof, the framing of which projects out to form a vertical wall suitable for windows or other openings.

Double glass- Window or door in which two panes of glass are used with a sealed air space between. Also known as Insulating Glass.

Double hung window- A window with two vertically sliding sashes, both of which can move up and down.

Downspout- A pipe, usually of metal, for carrying rainwater down from the roof's horizontal gutters.

Drip cap- A molding or metal flashing placed on the exterior topside of a door or window frame to cause water to drip beyond the outside of the frame.

Dry in- To install the black roofing felt (tar paper) on the roof.

Ducts- The heating system. Usually round or rectangular metal pipes installed for distributing warm (or cold) air from the furnace to rooms in the home. Also a tunnel made of galvanized metal or rigid fiberglass, which carries air from the heater or ventilation opening to the rooms in a building.

DWV (drain-waste-vent)- The section of a plumbing system that carries water and sewer gases out of a home.

Eaves- The horizontal exterior roof overhang.

Egress- A means of exiting the home. An egress window is required in every bedroom and basement. Normally a 4' X 4' window is the minimum size required

Elbow (ell)- A plumbing or electrical fitting that lets you change directions in runs of pipe or conduit.

Electric lateral- The trench or area in the yard where the electric service line (from a transformer or pedestal) is located, or the work of installing the electric service to a home.

Electric resistance coils- Metal wires that heat up when electric current passes through them and are used in baseboard heaters and electric water heaters.

Elevation sheet- The page on the blue prints that depicts the house or room as if a vertical plane were passed through the structure.

Escrow - The handling of funds or documents by a third party on behalf of the buyer and/or seller. heat from air in your home. Also see condensing unit.

FHA strap- Metal straps that are used to repair a bearing wall "cut-out", and to "tie together" wall corners, splices, and bearing headers. Also, they are used to hang stairs and landings to bearing headers.

Face nail- To install nails into the vertical face of a bearing header or beam.

Facing brick- The brick used and exposed on the outside of a wall. Usually these have a finished texture.

Fascia- Horizontal boards attached to rafter/truss ends at the eaves and along gables. Roof drain gutters are attached to the fascia.

Felt- Tar paper. Installed under the roof shingles. Normally 15 lb. or 30 lb.

Ferrule- Metal tubes used to keep roof gutters "open". Long nails (ferrule spikes) are driven through these tubes and hold the gutters in place along the fascia of the home.

Fire block- Short horizontal members sometimes nailed between studs, usually about halfway up a wall. See also 'Fire stop'.

Fire brick- Brick made of refractory ceramic material which will resist high temperatures. Used in a fireplace and boiler.

Fireplace chase flashing pan- A large sheet of metal that is installed around and perpendicular to the fireplace flue pipe. It's purpose is to confine and limit the spread of fire and smoke to a small area.

Fishplate (gusset)- A wood or plywood piece used to fasten the ends of two members together at a butt joint with nails or bolts. Sometimes used at the junction of opposite rafters near the ridge line. Sometimes called a gang nail plate.

Fish tape- A long strip of spring steel used for fishing cables and for pulling wires through conduit.

Flagstone (flagging or flags)- Flat stones (1 to 4 inches thick) used for walks, steps, floors, and vertical veneer (in lieu of brick).

Flakeboard- A manufactured wood panel made out of 1"-2" wood chips and glue. Often used as a substitute for plywood in the exterior wall and roof sheathing. Also called OSB or wafer board.

Flashing- Sheet metal or other material used in roof and wall construction to protect a building from water seepage.

Flat mold- Thin wood strips installed over the butt seam of cabinet skins.

Flat paint- An interior paint that contains a high proportion of pigment and dries to a flat or lusterless finish

Flue collar- Round metal ring which fits around the heat flue pipe after the pipe passes out of the roof.

Flue lining- 2-foot lengths, fire clay or terra-cotta pipe (round or square) and usually made in all ordinary flue sizes. Used for the inner lining of chimneys with the brick or masonry work done around the outside. Flue linings in chimneys runs from one foot below the flue connection to the top of the chimney.

Fly rafters- End rafters of the gable overhang supported by roof sheathing and lookouts.

Form- Temporary structure erected to contain concrete during placing and initial hardening.

Foundation- The supporting portion of a structure below the first floor construction, or below grade, including the footings.

Frame Inspection- The act of inspecting the home's structural integrity and it's compliance to local municipal codes.

Framing- Lumber used for the structural members of a building, such as studs, joists, and rafters.

Frost lid- Round metal lid that is installed on a water meter pit.

Furring strips- Strips of wood, often 1 X 2 and used to shim out and provide a level fastening surface for a wall or ceiling.

Gable- The end, upper, triangular area of a home, beneath the roof.

Gang nail plate- A steel plate attached to both sides at each joint of a truss. Sometimes called a fishplate or gussett.

Girder- A large or principal beam of wood or steel used to support concentrated loads at isolated points along its length.

Glazing- The process of installing glass, which commonly is secured with glazier's points and glazing compound.

Gloss enamel- A finishing paint material. Forms a hard coating with maximum smoothness of surface and dries to a sheen or luster (gloss)

Grade- Ground level, or the elevation at any given point. Also the work of leveling dirt. Also the designated quality of a manufactured piece of wood.

Grain- The direction, size, arrangement, appearance, or quality of the fibers in wood.

Grid- The completed assembly of main and cross tees in a suspended ceiling system before the ceiling panels are installed. Also the decorative slats (munton) installed between glass panels.

Groundwater- Water from an aquifer or subsurface water source.

Grout- A wet mixture of cement, sand and water that flows into masonry or ceramic crevices to seal the cracks between the different pieces. Mortar made of such consistency (by adding water) that it will flow into the joints and cavities of the masonry work and fill them solid.

Gusset- A flat wood, plywood, or similar type member used to provide a connection at the intersection of wood members. Most commonly used at joints of wood trusses. They are fastened by nails, screws, bolts, or adhesives.

Gyp board- Drywall. Wall board or gypsum- A panel (normally 4' X 8', 10', 12', or 16') made with a core of Gypsum (chalk-like) rock, which covers interior walls and ceilings.

Haunch- An extension, knee like protrusion of the foundation wall that a concrete porch or patio will rest upon for support.

Hearth- The fireproof area directly in front of a fireplace. The inner or outer floor of a fireplace, usually made of brick, tile, or stone.

Heating load- The amount of heating required to keep a building at a specified temperature during the winter, usually 65° F, regardless of outside temperature.

Heat meter- An electrical municipal inspection of the electric meter breaker panel box.

Heel cut- A notch cut in the end of a rafter to permit it to fit flat on a wall and on the top, doubled, exterior wall plate.

Highlights- A light spot, area, or streak on a painted surface.

Hip- A roof with four sloping sides. The external angle formed by the meeting of two sloping sides of a roof.

Hose bib- An exterior water faucet (sill cock).

Hurricane clip- Metal straps that are nailed and secure the roof rafters and trusses to the top horizontal wall plate.

Incandescent lamp- A lamp employing an electrically charged metal filament that glows at white heat. A typical light bulb.

Inside corner- The point at which two walls form an internal angle, as in the corner of a room.

Insulation- Any material high in resistance to heat transmission that, when placed in the walls, ceiling, or floors of a structure, and will reduce the rate of heat flow.

Interest - The cost paid to a lender for borrowed money.

J Channel- Metal edging used on drywall to give the edge a better finished appearance when a wall is not "wrapped" Generally, basement stairway walls have drywall only on the stair side. J Channel is used on the vertical edge of the last drywall sheet

Jack post- A type of structural support made of metal, which can be raised or lowered through a series of pins and a screw to meet the height required. Basically used as a replacement for an old supporting member in a building. See Monopost.

Jamb- The side and head lining of a doorway, window, or other opening. Includes studs as well as the frame and trim.

Joist- Wooden 2 X 8's, 10's, or 12's that run parallel to one another and support a floor or ceiling, and supported in turn by larger beams, girders, or bearing walls.

Jumpers- Water pipe installed in a water meter pit (before the water meter is installed), or electric wire that is installed in the electric house panel meter socket before the meter is installed. This is sometimes illegal.

Keeper- The metal latch plate in a door frame into which a doorknob plunger latches.

Keyless- A plastic or porcelain light fixture that operates by a pull string. Generally found in the basement, crawl space, and attic areas.

Keyway- A slot formed and poured on a footer or in a foundation wall when another wall will be installed at the slot location. This gives additional strength to the joint/meeting point.

Knot- In lumber, the portion of a branch or limb of a tree that appears on the edge or face of the piece.

Laminating- Bonding together two or more layers of materials.

Landing- A platform between flights of stairs or at the termination of a flight of stairs. Often used when stairs change direction. Normally no less than 3 ft. X 3 ft. square.

Lap- To cover the surface of one shingle or roll with another.

Latch- A beveled metal tongue operated by a spring-loaded knob or lever. The tongue's bevel lets you close the door and engage the locking mechanism, if any, without using a key. Contrasts with dead bolt.

Ledger (for a Structural Floor)- The wooden perimeter frame lumber member that bolts onto the face of a foundation wall and supports the wood structural floor.

Level- True horizontal. Also a tool used to determine level.

Lintel- A horizontal structural member that supports the load over an opening such as a door or window.

Lookout- A short wood bracket or cantilever that supports an overhang portion of a roof.

Louver- A vented opening into the home that has a series of horizontal slats and arranged to permit ventilation but to exclude rain, snow, light, insects, or other living creatures.

Lumens- Unit of measure for total light output. The amount of light falling on a surface of one square foot.

Mantel- The shelf above a fireplace opening. Also used in referring to the decorative trim around a fireplace opening.

Masonry- Stone, brick, concrete, hollow-tile, concrete block, or other similar building units or materials. Normally bonded together with mortar to form a wall.

Mastic- A pasty material used as a cement (as for setting tile) or a protective coating (as for thermal insulation or waterproofing)

Metal lath- Sheets of metal that are slit to form openings within the lath. Used as a plaster base for walls and ceilings and as reinforcing over other forms of plaster base.

Micro-lam- A manufactured structural wood beam. It is constructed of pressure and adhesive bonded wood strands of wood. They have a higher strength rating than solid sawn lumber. Normally comes in 1 ½" thickness' and 9 ½", 11 ½" and 14" widths

Milar (mylar)- Plastic, transparent copies of a blueprint.

Monopost- Adjustable metal column used to support a beam or bearing point. Normally 11 gauge or Schedule 40 metal, and determined by the structural engineer

Mortar- A mixture of cement (or lime) with sand and water used in masonry work.

Mortise- A slot cut into a board, plank, or timber, usually edgewise, to receive the tenon (or tongue) of another board, plank, or timber to form a joint.

Mullion- A vertical divider in the frame between windows, doors, or other openings.

Mushroom- The unacceptable occurrence when the top of a caisson concrete pier spreads out and hardens to become wider than the foundation wall thickness.

Nail inspection- An inspection made by a municipal building inspector after the drywall material is hung with nails and screws (and before taping).

Neutral wire- Usually color-coded white, this carries electricity from an outlet back to the service panel. Also see hot wire and ground.

Newel post- The large starting post to which the end of a stair guard railing or balustrade is fastened.

Nonbearing wall- A wall supporting no load other than its own weight.

Notch- A crosswise groove at the end of a board.

Nozzle- The part of a heating system that sprays the fuel of fuel-air mixture into the combustion chamber.

Oriented Strand Board or OSB- A manufactured 4' X 8' wood panel made out of 1"- 2" wood chips and glue. Often used as a substitute for plywood.

Outrigger- An extension of a rafter beyond the wall line. Usually a smaller member nailed to a larger rafter to form a cornice or roof overhang.

Outside corner- The point at which two walls form an external angle, one you usually can walk around.

Padding- A material installed under carpet to add foot comfort, isolate sound, and to prolong carpet life.

Paint- A combination of pigments with suitable thinners or oils to provide decorative and protective coatings. Can be oil based or latex water based.

Pallets- Wooden platforms used for storing and shipping material. Forklifts and hand trucks are used to move these wooden platforms around.

Panel- A thin flat piece of wood, plywood, or similar material, framed by stiles and rails as in a door (or cabinet door), or fitted into grooves of thicker material with molded edges for decorative wall treatment.

Plumb- Exactly vertical and perpendicular.

Ply- A term to denote the number of layers of roofing felt, veneer in plywood, or layers in built-up materials, in any finished piece of such material.

Plywood- A panel (normally 4' X 8') of wood made of three or more layers of veneer, compressed and joined with glue, and usually laid with the grain of adjoining plies at right angles to give the sheet strength.

Portland cement- Cement made by heating clay and crushed limestone into a brick and then grinding to a pulverized powder state.

Rabbet- A rectangular longitudinal groove cut in the corner edge of a board or plank.

Radiant heating- A method of heating, usually consisting of a forced hot water system with pipes placed in the floor, wall, or ceiling. Also electrically heated panels.

Radiation- Energy transmitted from a heat source to the air around it. Radiators actually depend more on convection than radiation.

Register- A grill placed over a heating duct or cold air return.

Reglaze- To replace a broken window.

Relief valve- A device designed to open if it detects excess temperature or pressure.

Roof jack- Sleeves that fit around the black plumbing waste vent pipes at, and are nailed to, the roof sheathing.

Roof joist- The rafters of a flat roof. Lumber used to support the roof sheathing and roof loads. Generally, 2 X 10's and 2 X 12's are used.

Roof valley- The "V" created where two sloping roofs meet.

Sheathing, sheeting- The structural wood panel covering, usually OSB or plywood, used over studs, floor joists or rafters/trusses of a structure.

Shingles, siding- Various kinds of shingles, used over sheathing for exterior wall covering of a structure.

Sill- (1) The 2 X 4 or 2 X 6 wood plate framing member that lays flat against and bolted to the foundation wall (with anchor bolts) and upon which the floor joists are installed. Normally the sill plate is treated lumber.

Slab, concrete- Concrete pavement, i.e. driveways, garages, and basement floors.

Slab, door- A rectangular door without hinges or frame.

Slab on grade- A type of foundation with a concrete floor which is placed directly on the soil. The edge of the slab is usually thicker and acts as the footing for the walls.

Slag- Concrete cement that sometimes covers the vertical face of the foundation void material.

Sleeper- Usually, a wood member embedded in concrete, as in a floor, that serves to support and to fasten the subfloor or flooring.

Sleeve(s)- Pipe installed under the concrete driveway or sidewalk, and that will be used later to run sprinkler pipe or low voltage wire.

Slope- The incline angle of a roof surface, given as a ratio of the rise (in inches) to the run (in feet). See also pitch.

Sump- Pit or large plastic bucket/barrel inside the home designed to collect ground water from a perimeter drain system.

Switch- A device that completes or disconnects an electrical circuit.

Tab - The exposed portion of strip shingles defined by cutouts.

Tail beam- A relatively short beam or joist supported in a wall on one end and by a header at the other.

Thermostat- A device which relegates the temperature of a room or building by switching heating or cooling equipment on or off. cotta- A ceramic material molded into masonry units.

Tinner- Another name for the heating contractor.

Top chord- The upper or top member of a truss.

Top plate- Top horizontal member of a frame wall supporting ceiling joists, rafters, or other members.

Transmitter (garage door)- The small, push button device that causes the garage door to open or close.

Trap- A plumbing fitting that holds water to prevent air, gas, and vermin from backing up into a fixture.

Tread- The walking surface board in a stairway on which the foot is placed.

Trimmer- The vertical stud that supports a header at a door, window, or other opening

Union- A plumbing fitting that joins pipes end-to-end so they can be dismantled.

Valley flashing- Sheet metal that lays in the "V" area of a roof valley.

Veneer- Extremely thin sheets of wood. Also a thin slice of wood or brick or stone covering a framed wall.

Vent- A pipe or duct which allows the flow of air and gasses to the outside. Also, another word for the moving glass part of a window sash, i.e. window vent.

Vermiculite- A mineral used as bulk insulation and also as aggregate in insulating and acoustical plaster and in insulating concrete floors.

Water tap- The connection point where the home water line connects to the main municipal water system.

Visqueen- A 4 mil or 6 mil plastic sheeting.

Wire nut- A plastic device used to connect bare wires together

Window sash- The operating or movable part of a window; the sash is made of window panes and their border.

