

TORONTO CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

DIY Projects

Do-it-yourself projects and when to hire a
professional

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Can I schedule trades myself instead of a contractor?

Yes, you can absolutely schedule trades yourself instead of hiring a general contractor, but this approach requires significant time, coordination skills, and construction knowledge to execute successfully.

Acting as your own general contractor (often called "owner-builder") can save you the 15-25% markup that GCs typically charge, but you'll be taking on substantial responsibilities. You'll need to coordinate scheduling between multiple trades, ensure proper sequencing of work, manage permits and inspections, handle material deliveries, and resolve any conflicts or delays that arise.

The coordination challenge is significant - especially in Toronto's competitive construction market where skilled trades are often booked weeks or months in advance. You'll need to understand that drywall can't go up until electrical and plumbing rough-ins are complete and inspected, that flooring installation must wait until painting is finished, and that HVAC ductwork needs to be coordinated with framing. A single delay can cascade through your entire schedule, and trades may charge extra for return visits if they show up and can't complete their work due to sequencing issues.

Toronto-specific considerations make this even more complex. You'll need to pull your own building permits through the City of Toronto (416-397-5330), schedule inspections at appropriate stages, and ensure all electrical work is done by ESA-licensed electricians and gas work by TSSA-certified technicians. The permit process alone can take 10-20 business days for simple projects, and you'll need to understand Ontario Building Code requirements to communicate effectively with inspectors.

When self-scheduling works well: Smaller projects like bathroom renovations, basement finishing, or kitchen updates where the scope is contained and the trade sequence is straightforward. Many homeowners successfully manage these by hiring a plumber for rough-in, electrician for wiring, then drywall, painting, and finishing trades in sequence.

When to hire a general contractor: Complex projects involving structural changes, additions, or whole-home renovations where multiple systems interact. The coordination becomes exponentially more difficult, and experienced GCs have established relationships with reliable subtrades who prioritize their work.

Your next steps should include getting quotes from both individual trades and general contractors to compare total costs. Factor in your time value - managing trades can easily become a full-time job during active construction phases. If you proceed with self-scheduling, start by finding your key trades (electrical, plumbing) first, as their availability often drives the entire timeline in Toronto's busy construction market.

Can I install a bathroom in an unfinished basement?

Yes, you can install a bathroom in an unfinished basement in Toronto, but it requires careful planning for plumbing connections, proper drainage, and building permits. The key challenge is typically getting waste lines to connect to your main sewer line, especially if your basement floor is concrete.

Drainage and Plumbing Considerations

The biggest hurdle is waste removal. If your main sewer line runs below your basement floor level, you can connect directly with gravity drainage. However, many Toronto homes built before the 1960s have sewer lines that are too high, requiring a **sewage ejector pump system**. This pump grinds waste and pumps it up to the main sewer line. Ejector pump systems cost \$2,500-\$4,500 installed and require a sealed pit in your basement floor.

For homes with basement floor drains, you'll need to determine if they connect to the sanitary sewer (good) or storm sewer (not suitable for bathroom waste). A licensed plumber can camera-inspect your existing drainage to determine the best connection point.

Toronto Building Permits and Code Requirements

Installing a basement bathroom requires a **plumbing permit** from the City of Toronto Building Division. The permit ensures proper venting, drainage slopes, and fixture spacing per the Ontario Building Code. Bathroom fans must exhaust directly outside (not into the basement ceiling), and electrical work requires separate permits if you're adding new circuits.

Ceiling Height and Ventilation

Toronto's building code requires minimum 6'5" ceiling height for habitable basement rooms. Most unfinished basements have 7-8 feet, so you'll likely meet this requirement even after installing a drywall ceiling. Proper ventilation is crucial - bathroom fans should move 50+ CFM and exhaust directly outdoors through the rim joist or foundation wall.

Professional vs DIY Considerations

While you can handle framing and drywall yourself, **hire licensed professionals for plumbing and electrical work**. Plumbing mistakes can cause expensive water damage, and electrical work in wet areas requires GFCI protection and proper bonding. A plumber will also handle the permit applications and inspections.

Cost Expectations

Budget \$8,000-\$18,000 for a basic basement bathroom including fixtures, plumbing rough-in, electrical, framing, drywall, and flooring. Add \$3,000-\$5,000 if you need an ejector pump system. Higher-end finishes can push costs to \$25,000+.

Next Steps

Start by having a licensed plumber assess your existing drainage and determine the best waste connection method. They can also pull the necessary permits and coordinate inspections. Once plumbing is roughed in and inspected, you can proceed with framing, electrical, and finishing work.

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Can I install heated floors in an existing bathroom?

Yes, you can absolutely install heated floors in an existing bathroom, and it's one of the most popular comfort upgrades Toronto homeowners make during bathroom renovations. The process involves removing your current flooring and installing either electric radiant heating mats or a hydronic (water-based) system before laying new tile or other suitable flooring.

Electric radiant systems are the most practical choice for existing bathrooms in Toronto homes. These thin heating mats or cables can be installed directly over your existing subfloor with minimal height increase (typically just 1/8" to 1/4"). The system connects to a dedicated 240V circuit and uses a programmable thermostat to maintain your desired temperature. Installation typically takes 1-2 days for an average bathroom, plus time for new flooring installation.

Hydronic systems, while more efficient for larger areas, are rarely cost-effective for single bathroom retrofits. These require connecting to your home's boiler system or installing a dedicated water heater, making them better suited for whole-home installations or major renovations where multiple rooms are being upgraded simultaneously.

For Toronto's climate, heated bathroom floors provide exceptional comfort during our long winters, and many homeowners report it's their favorite renovation upgrade. The system works particularly well under ceramic tile, porcelain, or natural stone flooring. Luxury vinyl and engineered hardwood can also work with lower temperature settings, but carpet isn't recommended as it insulates against the heat transfer.

Electrical requirements are crucial - heated floors require a dedicated circuit and GFCI protection, which means you'll need an ESA-certified electrician to handle the electrical connections. The Electrical Safety Authority requires permits for this work, and proper installation is essential for both safety and warranty coverage. Never attempt the

electrical connections yourself, as bathroom electrical work has strict safety requirements due to moisture concerns.

Installation costs in the Toronto market typically range from \$12-18 per square foot for electric systems, including materials and professional installation. For a standard 50 square foot bathroom, expect \$600-900 for the heating system plus \$1,500-3,000 for tile removal, installation, and electrical work. The project usually requires removing your existing flooring down to the subfloor, so factor in complete floor replacement costs.

Professional installation is strongly recommended for this project. While the heating mats themselves aren't overly complex to lay out, the electrical connections, proper insulation, and waterproofing details require expertise. Improper installation can lead to system failure, electrical hazards, or moisture problems in your bathroom.

Next steps: Consult with both a bathroom renovation contractor and an ESA-certified electrician to assess your electrical panel capacity and plan the installation. Most contractors can coordinate both trades, and the work integrates well with other bathroom updates like vanity or shower renovations.

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