

10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU PURCHASE A RETRACTABLE AWNING

A retractable awning is a major investment for most homeowners - typically running between \$3,000 and \$6,000 for a fully custom made, professionally installed unit. Before you plunk down your hard-earned cash, consider these 10 key factors. Doing your homework can save you time and money and help to avoid more of life's headaches.

1. Who are you purchasing from?

With this size investment, you want to check out your local dealer(s) with the Better Business Bureau and request references from your area. No matter how good the product is, the dealer selection is almost as important. You can also check Angie's List for unbiased consumer feedback.

2. Do they do their own installations?

Does the dealer stand behind their own installations or do they farm it out to a subcontractor? Do they warranty the installation for a period of time? Does their warranty include any service work or future adjustments?

3. What kind of fasteners are they using to attach this 200 to 400 pound unit over your head?

With today's construction and materials constantly changing, make sure your installer is using a minimum of 3/8" wide shaft lag screw. Depending on the material to which the installer is mounting, length of the lag screws is also an important factor. Their goal when installing is to reach the center of the house's framework after removing all exterior materials that can be compressed - typically foam board under vinyl siding.

4. Is the fabric 100% acrylic?

Most acrylics will not rot mildew or excessively fade and are the same color/pattern on both sides. Popular US distributed brands to consider are Sunbrella, Dickson and Sattler. Some awning manufacturers will carry private label fabrics which are produced in Europe or Asia. A 100% acrylic fabric sewn with UV stable thread should last 8 to 12 years with maintenance (cleaning).

5. Warranty – is it prorated or a full warranty?

Some companies on-line only offer prorated warranties while others will provide full coverage throughout the warranty period. If a future claim needs to be made, a full warranty can save you a lot of out-of-pocket expenses.

6. How is the awning going to operate?

Initially, the price of a motor may seem high as compared to a manual, hand crank operation usually included in the unit price. With a motor, you typically operate the awning with a hand held remote or wall switch. You will use your awning 10 times more often with a motor than a hand crank. Somfy, the industry's leading supplier has the research to back up this claim.

7. Where is the awning assembled and what is the source of the frame components?

Most quality awnings are assembled here in the United States. They are made to order and typically take a week to two weeks to produce. Some companies save money by bringing in lower quality units and components from China. As with most outdoor products, many China produced components will not withstand the diverse US climate evident in peeling paint, faded fabrics, or rusted fasteners – just look outside at things that are falling apart, where did they come from? I'm betting China. With retractable awnings, you do get what you pay for... Pay a little more to avoid the disappointment of low quality and shorter lifespan.

8. What applies the spring force in the retractable arms?

All retractable awnings rely on a spring-loaded folding arm that exerts outward pressure to keep the fabric tight. When you extend an awning, think of it as slowly letting off a brake. The real work is when you go to retract the awning. It is much harder on you (manually operated) or the motor to retract the awning due to the internal arm springs you are now stretching. Typically the springs apply tension using three methods – cables, chains or belts. Cables can be stainless or galvanized, PVC coated. Chains are typically the size of what you would find on a bicycle. Belts can consist of Kevlar material or multiple smaller cables encased in PVC. Most will claim between 20,000 and 100,000 arm cycle durability.

9. Are you buying a national brand rather than a retailer's own assembled awning?

Locally assembled retailer units have potentially two major issues: first, they typically change up their product sourcing based on who they can get the best deal from year to year. This may cause issues in the future with the availability of frame components rendering the awning totally inoperable. The second issue, if they go out of business, where would you get service or parts from? Most leading brands maintain the products for many years and if your local dealer goes out of business in the future, they can recommend another one in your area.

10. Do I need an optional protective hood?

A hood is recommended if the awning is roof mounted (on the roofing surface) or mounted on a wall without protection, i.e. soffit or eave above it. The hood will keep the first 6 to 8 inches of fabric clean so when you roll out your awning, the fabric looks clean and color consistent. If it's a motorized unit, it will provide an extra layer of protection from the elements, especially water from entering the motor. Typically water damage to the motor is not covered by the warranty.