

OTTAWA ELECTRICAL

Outdoor Electrical

Outdoor outlets, landscape lighting, pools, and hot
tubs

9 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Q1

Do I need GFCI outlets in my unfinished basement?

Yes, you need GFCI protection for outlets in unfinished basements in Ontario. According to the Ontario Electrical Safety Code (OESC), GFCI protection is required for all 125-volt, 15- and 20-ampere receptacles installed in unfinished basements.

This requirement exists because unfinished basements are considered **wet or damp locations** where the risk of electrical shock is significantly higher. Concrete floors, exposed foundation walls, and higher humidity levels create conditions where electricity can more easily find a path to ground through your body. GFCI outlets detect these dangerous ground faults and shut off power in milliseconds, potentially saving your life.

What qualifies as an "unfinished basement" includes any basement area that isn't considered habitable living space - areas with exposed ceiling joists, concrete floors, unfinished walls, or spaces primarily used for storage, utilities, or workshops. Even if you've painted the walls or added some lighting, it's likely still considered unfinished from a code perspective unless it meets all the requirements for habitable space.

If your unfinished basement currently has standard outlets, they need to be replaced with GFCI outlets or protected by GFCI breakers. This is particularly important in older Ottawa homes where basement outlets were installed before current safety standards. **This work requires an ESA permit** since you're modifying electrical protection, and it must be done by a licensed electrician.

Don't delay on this upgrade - unfinished basements are where many electrical accidents occur, especially when using power tools, shop equipment, or extension cords on concrete floors. The combination of moisture, concrete, and electricity creates the perfect conditions for a fatal shock.

For GFCI outlet installation in your Ottawa home's unfinished basement, expect to pay \$150-250 per outlet including the GFCI device and professional installation. While this might seem like an expense, it's a critical safety investment that protects your family and ensures your electrical system meets current Ontario code requirements.

Q2

What does it cost to run electricity to a detached garage in Ottawa?

Running electricity to a detached garage in Ottawa typically costs \$2,500 to \$6,000, depending on the distance, electrical requirements, and whether trenching is needed. This includes the ESA permit, materials, labor, and inspection.

The cost breakdown varies significantly based on your specific situation. **Distance is the biggest factor** - a garage 30 feet from your house will cost much less than one 150 feet away. You'll also need to consider the electrical load you want in the garage. A basic 20-amp circuit for lights and a few outlets runs much less than a 60-amp subpanel that can handle welders, EV charging, or multiple power tools.

Underground installation is the most common and code-compliant method in Ottawa. This involves trenching from your main panel to the garage, installing appropriate conduit and wiring rated for direct burial or conduit use. The Ontario Electrical Safety Code requires specific burial depths - typically 18 inches for residential installations, though this can vary based on the wire type and protection used. If your property has landscaping, concrete, or other obstacles between the house and garage, trenching costs increase significantly.

Overhead installation might be possible in some situations and can reduce costs, but ESA has strict requirements for clearances over driveways, walkways, and property lines. Many Ottawa properties don't have the proper clearances for overhead runs, making underground the only viable option.

The electrical service size you choose affects both material and permit costs. A simple 20-amp circuit might only require basic wiring and a small subpanel, while a 60-amp or 100-amp service requires heavier gauge wire, larger conduit, and a more substantial subpanel. Most homeowners find that installing more capacity upfront is cost-effective, even if they don't need it immediately.

ESA permits and inspections are mandatory for this work and typically cost \$150-300 depending on the scope. The work must be completed by a licensed electrician, and ESA will inspect both the connection at your main panel and the installation in the garage. This ensures everything meets the Ontario Electrical Safety Code and is safe for long-term use.

Additional considerations that affect cost include whether your main panel has available breaker spaces and sufficient capacity. If your panel is full or undersized, you might need a panel upgrade first, adding \$2,000-3,500 to the project. The garage also needs proper grounding and bonding, which might require additional ground rods depending on the installation.

For a typical Ottawa detached garage 50-75 feet from the house with a 30-40 amp subpanel, expect to invest \$3,500-4,500. This provides enough power for lighting, outlets, garage door opener, and some power tools while meeting all ESA requirements.

Want to discuss your specific garage electrical needs? Electrical Ottawa offers free consultations to assess your property and provide accurate pricing based on your exact requirements and local conditions.

My outdoor outlet stopped working after it rained. What do I do?

Your outdoor outlet likely tripped its GFCI protection due to moisture - this is a safety feature working as designed. Start by checking if the outlet has a reset button, or look for a GFCI outlet elsewhere (often in the garage, basement, or bathroom) that may control your outdoor circuit.

First, ensure your safety - never touch or attempt to use a wet electrical outlet. Wait for it to completely dry before investigating. Once dry, look for a small "reset" button on the outlet itself or trace back to find the GFCI device protecting that circuit. GFCI outlets have "test" and "reset" buttons and are commonly located in garages, basements, or bathrooms. Press the reset button firmly - you should hear a click.

Under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code, all outdoor outlets must have GFCI protection within 1.5 meters of grade level. This protection detects even tiny electrical leaks that could occur when moisture enters the outlet, immediately cutting power to prevent electrocution. When water gets into an outdoor outlet - whether from rain, snow, or sprinkler systems - the GFCI trips as a safety measure.

If resetting the GFCI doesn't restore power, you may have a more serious issue. **Water intrusion can damage the outlet, wiring connections, or create a ground fault that keeps tripping the protection.** Common problems include deteriorated outlet covers, damaged weatherproof boxes, or loose wire connections that allow moisture penetration. Old outdoor outlets without proper weather-resistant covers are particularly vulnerable.

This is where professional help becomes essential - diagnosing why a GFCI won't reset requires electrical testing equipment and expertise. The problem could be a damaged outlet, compromised wiring, or moisture still present in the electrical box. Working on outdoor electrical systems while troubleshooting can be extremely dangerous, especially if moisture is involved.

For your safety and to meet ESA requirements, have a licensed electrician inspect the outlet and its protection. They can determine if you need a new weather-resistant outlet, improved weatherproofing, or if there's underlying wiring damage. Modern outdoor installations use "in-use" covers that protect outlets even when something is plugged in - a worthwhile upgrade if your current setup uses basic flip covers.

Don't ignore this issue - a repeatedly tripping GFCI or one that won't reset indicates a real electrical problem that could worsen over time. For reliable outdoor electrical service that meets Ontario safety standards, contact Electrical Ottawa for a professional assessment and any necessary repairs.

Q4

How much does it cost to add a dedicated circuit for a hot tub?

Adding a dedicated circuit for a hot tub in Ottawa typically costs \$800 to \$1,500, depending on the distance from your electrical panel, the amperage required, and any trenching or conduit work needed.

The cost varies significantly based on several factors. **Most residential hot tubs require either a 40-amp or 50-amp dedicated circuit** using 8 AWG or 6 AWG wire respectively. If your hot tub is located close to your electrical panel (within 50 feet) and the run is straightforward, you'll be on the lower end of the price range. However, if the hot tub is far from the panel or requires underground wiring across your yard, costs can increase substantially due to trenching and conduit requirements.

Your electrical panel must have adequate capacity to handle the new circuit. A typical hot tub draws 40-50 amps, so if your panel is already near capacity, you might need a panel upgrade first, which adds \$2,000-\$3,500 to the project. The circuit installation itself includes running the appropriate gauge wire, installing a new breaker, connecting a disconnect switch within sight of the hot tub (required by the Ontario Electrical Safety Code), and ensuring proper GFCI protection.

ESA permits and inspection are mandatory for hot tub electrical installations in Ontario. The permit typically costs \$75-\$150, and the work must be completed by a licensed electrician. The ESA inspector will verify that the installation meets code requirements, including proper grounding, bonding of metal components, and GFCI protection. Hot tub electrical work is particularly safety-critical due to the combination of electricity and water.

Additional costs may include a concrete pad for the disconnect switch (\$200-\$400), trenching for underground runs (\$5-\$15 per linear foot), and any necessary upgrades to your electrical service. If you're installing the hot tub on a deck, special considerations for wire routing and support may apply.

Never attempt hot tub electrical work yourself - the combination of high amperage circuits and water creates serious electrocution and fire risks. Insurance companies may deny claims for unpermitted electrical work, and improper installation can be deadly.

For a free estimate on your hot tub circuit installation, Electrical Ottawa's ESA-licensed electricians can assess your specific situation and provide accurate pricing based on your panel capacity and installation requirements.

Q5

How much does it cost to add outdoor lighting in Ottawa?

Outdoor lighting installation in Ottawa typically costs between \$200-800 per fixture for professional installation, with most homeowners spending \$1,500-4,000 for a complete outdoor lighting system.

The total cost depends on several factors including the type of fixtures, wiring complexity, and whether new circuits are needed. **Landscape lighting** with low-voltage LED fixtures runs \$200-400 per light, while **security floodlights** or **decorative post lights** requiring 120V circuits cost \$300-800 each installed.

Basic outdoor lighting projects like replacing existing porch lights or adding motion sensor floods to existing circuits are on the lower end. However, **comprehensive landscape lighting systems** with path lights, accent lighting, and architectural features require more extensive wiring and planning, pushing costs higher.

ESA permits are required when adding new outdoor circuits or installing fixtures that need new wiring runs. Most outdoor lighting installations need permits since they involve new circuits or modifications to existing electrical systems. Your licensed electrician will handle the permit process and ensure all work meets Ontario Electrical Safety Code requirements for wet locations.

Key cost factors in Ottawa include:

- **Fixture quality:** Basic LED floods (\$100-200) vs. premium landscape lights (\$300-600)
- **Wiring complexity:** Existing circuits vs. new dedicated circuits from the panel
- **Trenching:** Underground wiring for landscape lights adds \$8-15 per linear foot
- **GFCI protection:** Required for all outdoor circuits, may need panel upgrades
- **Winter installation:** Frozen ground can increase labor costs 20-30%

Safety considerations are critical with outdoor electrical work. All outdoor outlets and lighting circuits must have GFCI protection, and fixtures must be rated for wet locations. **Low-voltage landscape lighting** (12V systems) offers safer installation and lower operating costs, though the transformer and connections still require professional installation to code.

Popular outdoor lighting options in Ottawa include LED security floods with motion sensors (\$300-500 installed), decorative coach lights for entryways (\$400-700), and comprehensive landscape lighting packages starting around \$2,500 for basic coverage of a typical residential lot.

For a free estimate on your outdoor lighting project tailored to your specific property and needs, Electrical Ottawa can provide detailed pricing and design recommendations from ESA-licensed electricians in the Ottawa Construction Network.

How do I add power to my shed in the backyard?

Adding power to your backyard shed requires running a new electrical circuit from your main panel, which needs an ESA permit and must be installed by a licensed electrician in Ontario. This isn't a DIY project - it involves working with your main electrical panel and running underground or overhead wiring, both of which require professional installation and inspection.

The most common and code-compliant method is running underground electrical cable from your home's main panel to the shed. Your electrician will install a dedicated circuit breaker in your main panel, then run either direct-burial cable (like NMWU) or individual conductors through underground conduit to a subpanel or outlets in your shed. The circuit size depends on your power needs - typically 15A or 20A for basic lighting and outlets, or 30A+ if you plan to run power tools or heating.

Underground installation is generally preferred because it's more protected from weather and accidental damage. The cable must be buried at the proper depth according to the Ontario Electrical Safety Code - typically 18 inches for direct-burial cable or 12 inches when run through conduit. Your electrician will also need to install proper grounding at the shed, which may require a grounding rod depending on the installation method and distance from your house.

Overhead installation is sometimes more cost-effective but has strict height requirements - minimum 12 feet over walkways and 15 feet over driveways. The wire must be properly supported and protected from weather. Many homeowners prefer underground to avoid visible wires crossing their yard.

For a typical shed installation in Ottawa, expect costs of **\$1,200 - \$2,500** depending on the distance from your house, circuit amperage, and whether you choose underground or overhead routing. This includes the ESA permit (around \$75), materials, labor, and inspection. Underground installations typically cost more due to trenching requirements.

ESA permit and inspection are mandatory for this work. Your licensed electrician will pull the permit before starting work, and an ESA inspector will verify the installation meets code requirements. This protects you and ensures your homeowner's insurance remains valid.

Before starting, consider what you'll power in the shed - basic lighting and a few outlets need less capacity than if you plan to run a table saw, welder, or electric heater. Your electrician can help size the circuit appropriately and determine if your main panel has sufficient capacity for the additional load.

For a free consultation on powering your shed, Electrical Ottawa's licensed electricians can assess your specific situation and provide an accurate quote based on your property layout and power requirements.

Q7

How do I add an outdoor outlet to my deck?

Adding an outdoor outlet to your deck requires an ESA permit and must be installed by a licensed electrician in Ontario. This isn't a DIY project - outdoor electrical work involves specific safety requirements and code compliance that only licensed professionals can legally perform.

The installation process involves running a new dedicated circuit from your electrical panel to the deck location. Your electrician will install a weatherproof outlet box rated for outdoor use, typically a GFCI-protected receptacle that's required by the Ontario Electrical Safety Code for all outdoor locations. The wiring must be properly protected - either through conduit if surface-mounted, or buried cable if running underground to reach your deck.

GFCI protection is mandatory for all outdoor outlets under OESC Rule 26-700. This safety device shuts off power within milliseconds if it detects electrical leakage, preventing electrocution. The outlet itself needs to be a weatherproof model with a cover that seals when in use, and it must be mounted at least 150mm (6 inches) above the deck surface to prevent water accumulation.

ESA permit requirements apply to this work since you're adding a new circuit. Your licensed electrician will pull the permit before starting work, and an ESA inspector will verify the installation meets code requirements. The typical cost in Ottawa ranges from **\$400 to \$800** depending on the distance from your panel and complexity of the wire run.

Safety considerations make this critical professional work. Outdoor electrical installations face moisture, temperature extremes, and physical damage risks. Improper installation can cause electrocution, fires, or equipment damage. Additionally, your home insurance may not cover damage from unpermitted electrical work.

What you can do is plan the outlet location and clear the path for your electrician. Consider how you'll use the outlet - will you need multiple receptacles for holiday lights, power tools, or outdoor entertaining? Discuss these needs with your electrician to ensure adequate capacity.

For a free consultation on adding outdoor outlets to your deck, Electrical Ottawa connects you with ESA-licensed electricians who understand Ottawa's specific requirements and weather challenges. We'll ensure your outdoor electrical work is safe, code-compliant, and properly permitted through the ESA.

Q8

How much does pool electrical work cost in Ottawa?

Pool electrical work in Ottawa typically costs \$2,000 - \$8,000 depending on the complexity, with basic above-ground pool wiring starting around \$1,500 and full in-ground pool electrical systems reaching \$6,000+.

The cost varies significantly based on your pool type and electrical requirements. **Above-ground pools** generally need simpler electrical work - typically a dedicated 20A GFCI circuit for the pump and filter system, plus proper bonding of metal components. This usually runs \$1,500 - \$3,000 including the ESA permit and inspection.

In-ground pools require much more extensive electrical work under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code. You'll need multiple dedicated circuits: typically a 20A circuit for the pump, separate circuits for lights (12V transformers), heaters, and any additional equipment like automatic covers or water features. The **equipotential bonding** requirements are also more complex, requiring bonding of all metal components, reinforcing steel, and water within 1.5 meters of the pool. This comprehensive electrical package typically costs \$4,000 - \$8,000.

Hot tubs and spas have their own requirements, usually needing a dedicated 40A or 50A GFCI circuit depending on the unit's specifications. Installation typically runs \$1,200 - \$2,500, but can be higher if your electrical panel needs upgrading to handle the additional load.

ESA permits are mandatory for all pool electrical work in Ontario. The permit process includes plan review and on-site inspection to ensure all GFCI protection, bonding, and clearance requirements are met. Pool electrical work is particularly scrutinized because water and electricity create serious safety risks - improper installation can be fatal.

Distance from your electrical panel significantly affects costs. If your pool equipment is far from the house, you'll need longer wire runs and potentially larger wire gauges to handle voltage drop, which can add \$500 - \$1,500 to the project. Some installations may require a subpanel near the pool area.

Panel capacity is another cost factor. Many older Ottawa homes have 100A services that may not handle the additional pool load, especially if you're adding a heater or heat pump. A panel upgrade to 200A would add \$2,000 - \$3,500 to your total project cost.

Safety is non-negotiable with pool electrical work. The Ontario Electrical Safety Code has strict requirements for GFCI protection, bonding, and equipment placement. DIY pool electrical work is illegal and extremely dangerous - electrocution in water is often fatal. Only ESA-licensed electricians should handle this work.

For a detailed estimate on your specific pool electrical needs, Electrical Ottawa offers free consultations to assess your current electrical system and provide accurate pricing for your project.

What is the electrical requirement for a sauna in Ontario?

Saunas in Ontario require dedicated 220V circuits with specific amperage based on heater size, GFCI protection, and proper ventilation wiring - all requiring ESA permits and professional installation.

Sauna electrical requirements in Ontario are governed by the Ontario Electrical Safety Code (OESC) and involve several critical safety considerations. The electrical demands vary significantly based on whether you're installing a traditional Finnish sauna or an infrared sauna, with power requirements ranging from 15 amps for small infrared units to 60+ amps for large traditional saunas.

Traditional Finnish saunas typically require 220V dedicated circuits with amperage ranging from 30A to 60A depending on heater size. A 6kW heater needs a 30A circuit with 10 AWG wire, while larger 9kW+ heaters require 40A or 50A circuits with appropriately sized conductors. The sauna heater must be hardwired - no plug-and-play connections are permitted for units over 1500 watts. **Infrared saunas** are generally more electrical-friendly, with many smaller units operating on standard 120V/15A circuits, though larger models still require 220V/30A dedicated circuits.

GFCI protection requirements are crucial for sauna installations. While the sauna heater itself typically doesn't require GFCI protection (as it's considered a fixed appliance), any receptacles within 1.5 meters of the sauna must be GFCI protected according to OESC Rule 26-700. This includes outlets for lighting, ventilation fans, or any accessories. The sauna room lighting must be rated for high-temperature environments and properly enclosed to prevent moisture intrusion.

Ventilation is electrically critical for sauna safety. Most saunas require dedicated exhaust fans on separate circuits, typically 120V/15A for residential units. The fan must be rated for high-temperature operation and properly controlled - many installations include timer switches or humidity-sensing controls. Some jurisdictions require mechanical ventilation to operate whenever the sauna heater is energized.

ESA permit requirements are mandatory for sauna installations in Ontario. This includes the dedicated circuits, any new panel work if your existing panel lacks capacity, and all associated wiring. The electrical work must be completed by a licensed electrician, and ESA inspection is required before the sauna can be legally operated. Typical installation costs in Ottawa range from \$1,500-\$3,000 for the electrical work alone, depending on distance from panel and whether panel upgrades are needed.

Panel capacity considerations are often overlooked. Adding a 40A sauna circuit to an already-loaded 100A panel may require a service upgrade to 200A, adding \$2,000-\$3,500 to your project cost. Your electrician should perform a load calculation to ensure adequate capacity for the sauna plus your home's existing electrical demands.

For your specific sauna installation, consult with an ESA-licensed electrician who can assess your electrical panel capacity, determine proper circuit sizing, and ensure all code requirements are met. The combination of high amperage, high temperature, and moisture makes sauna electrical work particularly critical for safety - this isn't a DIY project under any circumstances.

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