Carport Quotes

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Buyer's Guide

Car ports provide shelter for your car, motorbike, caravan, motorhome or van without the expense, complication or space that building a new garage would entail.

When you install a car port, not only are you protecting your vehicle from the elements, but you are also providing cover around an entrance or patio and so increasing the amount of usable outdoor space you have in any weather.

They are also much faster to build than garages and yet offer protection from the worst that the British weather can throw at you. In the summer, a car port will protect your vehicle from damage to paintwork caused by ultra violet light whilst also giving you a shady place to sit outside on the hottest days. In the winter, a car port will mean that you won't have to spend time in the mornings scraping ice off the car's windscreen.

Planning a car port

Before you begin to look for a supplier and installer, it's important to know what size of car port you need and what style you are looking for. Car ports come in a variety of styles and materials and fall into two main categories: freestanding and those which are attached to your property. Attached car parts can be designed to be either cantilevered from the main building or of lean-to construction.

There are a wide range of materials used in car port construction and these include wood, steel, aluminium, PVC and Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP).

When designed properly and built using quality materials, a car port will require very little maintenance and will keep its appearance for years. If you are thinking about building a car port, then you should consider how it might affect the appearance of your property and how this could improve or reduce its value. To ensure that it does not reduce the value of your home by putting off future buyers, a well-designed and constructed car part should complement your property's aesthetic. It should also be robust - built from quality materials and, if attached to the property, fixed securely and professionally.

Car ports which are not attractive or otherwise do not improve the look of your house or provide your car with enough cover will prove to be expensive mistakes. Not only will they potentially reduce the value of your property, but they may not give enough covered space for both your vehicle and for you to get in and out of it in comfort.

Likewise with low-quality materials. These could actually reduce the value of your house because they may degrade quickly and require much more maintenance. You may end up having to replace a poor quality car port much earlier than expected. Opting for something cheap could end up costing you much more in the long run.

We've all seen car ports that are ugly, poorly made and visibly degraded. Ask yourself if you would want such an addition to your home before you start looking at the cheaper options or employing a builder with little experience of car ports to design and construct one from scratch.

Styles

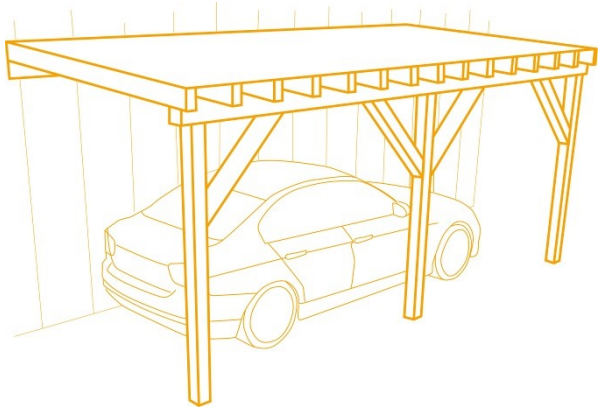
Car ports can either be free-standing structures or can be mounted to a wall - either as a cantilever structure or as a lean-to. A car port, unlike a garage, does not have four walls and so offers less protection but more ventilation.

Some car ports can be removed and relocated to another area.

When you are planning the style of car port that you need, think about more than just the car. You'll need to consider the covered space around the vehicle, where the entrance and exit to the property is in relation to where you park your car, whether you plan to ever carry out vehicle maintenance underneath the car port and how much covered space you will need and whether you may sometimes use the area as a covered outdoor entertainment and relaxation area.

Lean-to

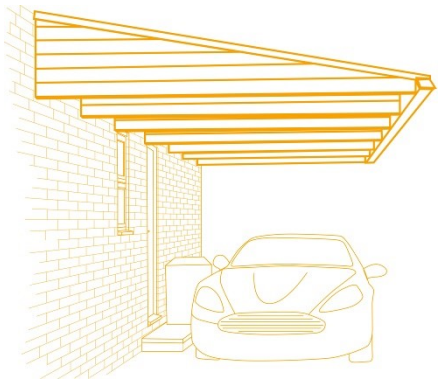
A lean-to car port isstill attached to the wall of a building (at the highest point of the port's roof) but also is supported on the ground either with posts or other supports. Lean-to car ports are usually the least expensive designs and also allow greater protection from the elements when vehicle occupants are moving from the car to the house.



Cantilevered car ports

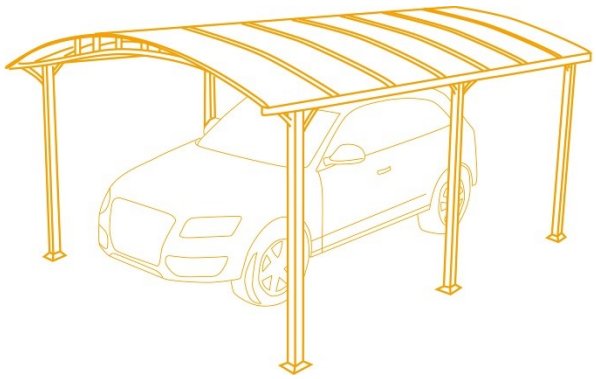
These car ports are only supported by the wall upon which they are attached. There are no legs or other supports on the edge furthest from the building. Because of this, they require more planning and design work including wind, load and snow load calculations. This may require the services of a structural engineer who may rule a cantilevered car port out as an option where wall thickness, foundation strength or average wind speeds are a concern.

Cantilevered car ports usually look best as additions to contemporary houses and, given the high tensile materials used in their construction, less good on period or older homes.



Freestanding car ports

Freestanding car ports are the most versatile and flexible designs because they do not have to be fixed to or placed up against a supporting wall. But because they need supports on all four sides, they are often the most expensive designs.



Architect-designed

Those with a larger budget to play with may wish to consider having an architect design a bespoke car port to complement their property.

Involving an architect may also be a good option if you are planning to incorporate a room above your car port as they will be able to help you maximise use of the available space. A good architect will also be able advise about necessary planning consents.

Other design considerations

The style of your car port should fit in with your home's architectural style or, in some cases, can be strikingly different - for example a contemporary car structure placed against an older property can provide a pleasing contrast. Some suppliers will have software which allows you to mock up how the car port will look when attached to your house.

Materials - Framework

Your car port's frame and the material used in its construction will affect how long it lasts and how good it looks against your property. There are a wide number of materials used in car port construction so it's important to spend time considering which one will make an attractive and durable addition to your home without breaking the bank.

PVC

PVC is everywhere thanks to the growth of the uPVC window and door industry over the last 30 years. Because of this mass production, it is a relatively cheap material which, when installed properly, can carry on looking good for a number of years. It also requires very little maintenance.

However, it does have its disadvantages. The material can expand and contract considerably in hot or cold weather meaning that if not installed correctly, leaks might open up between the frame and the roof panels. It can also discolour in very strong sunlight although most installers can paint a special covering onto the material to reduce this to a minimum.

Steel

One of the strongest materials used in car port construction, steel allows you to install large and attractive cantilevered structures which will last for years. But it is one of the most expensive materials used for building car ports and has to be treated before installation to prevent rust - this is usually done either by galvanising it or giving it a professional powder coat.

Once it is up, you will need to regularly maintain a steel car port to prevent it rusting and looking shabby. This may include an extensive repaint once every few years, adding to the structure's cost over the long term.

Aluminium

Next to steel, aluminium is the most durable material from which to build a car port. It is usually considerably cheaper than steel and, because it is relatively lightweight, can be added to thinner walls and buildings. Most aluminium car ports will last for a quarter of a century or longer because they are not prone to rust.

Aluminium does not require as much maintenance as other materials and will look good for many years with only the minimal amount of repainting.

Timber

Wood is the most environmentally friendly choice of material for your car port, as it is a natural, renewable product. It can also be a cost-effective option, however there are a number of factors to consider before you choose a timber car port.

Softwood is the cheapest option, but it must be treated to protect against rotting. There is also the risk of splitting, warping or bending if not fitted correctly. Hardwoods, such as oak, are a superior choice, but will be more expensive. A traditionally framed outbuilding is built using green oak and time-honoured methods, which can give beautiful results.

Glue laminated (or 'glulam') timber is also widely used in the building of car ports. It is created by bonding layers of dimensional timber with durable, moisture-resistant structural adhesives and the resulting material has a tensile strength similar to steel, with the appearance of wood. It can be used in both traditional post and beam style structures and more modern designs. Again, it is a more expensive choice.

Building from timber gives a great deal of design flexibility. Lean-to car ports against your house, or an existing wall, can be built from wood. But timber really comes into its own when it comes to freestanding designs – the options are really limitless.

A timber car port can be as simple as a single-bay structure for one car, with a gable-ended pitched roof. Additional bays can easily be added to the design, allowing space for three or four vehicles. These are particularly attractive options for historic or listed properties, particularly those in a rural setting, as they tend to complement the existing architecture.

Constructing a timber car port also opens other possibilities as it enables you to construct a room in the roof space above the car parking area or in an enclosed bay next to the car port. This additional space can make an ideal home office, studio, guest room or simply useful extra storage. If you have wood fires, a log storage area can also be incorporated into the design.

Be aware however that larger buildings, and particularly those providing additional accommodation, are more likely to require planning permission, so ensure you check with your local authority before you go ahead.

Roofs on traditional-style timber car ports are usually tiled, giving more design options and allowing you to choose tiles made from materials in keeping with the local vernacular, such as red clay or slate. Wooden shingles are another option for roofs and these will weather down over time to give a natural feel which blends into the landscape. Another attractive possibility with a timber-framed car port is to top it with a natural green roof – if you decide on this option, make sure you find a contractor who is familiar with the requirements for a green-roofed structure.

Traditional is not the only option with a timber-built car port – it can also be used to great effect to create sleek modern design. Glue laminated ('glulam') timber opens enormous possibilities as it can be made into almost any shape, enabling curving designs not otherwise possible with wood. A number of companies specialise in this sort of construction.

Slats of timber such as cedar can also be used to stunning effect for a contemporary look, either with gaps between pieces to allow light through, or set together for a simple and elegant enclosure.

Materials - roofing panels

As with the materials used in the frame, it's vital that you select the right material for your roofing panels if they are to withstand the elements and not crack or degrade in either very cold or very hot weather.

The three most-used materials are glass reinforced plastic (GRP), polycarbonate and glass.

Glass reinforced plastic (GRP)

This is the most common material used in roofing panels in cantilevered car ports which are attached to your house or other building on your property. It is often referred to as fibre glass. GRP is a laminated composite composed of millions of glass fibres bound in a polyester resin and is incredibly strong and lightweight.

There are a number of advantages from choosing GRP over other materials: The panels in the car port will look like glass and can either be translucent or opaque; a wide number of colours are available; it is versatile; and it can have a special coating applied which will protect it from ultra violet light and prevent perishing and degradation.

The disadvantages of GRP are that even with a protective coating, some discolouration and fading from sunlight can still occur; the material has a lifespan of only 10 years or so; and its rough surface may make it difficult to keep clean and require more maintenance than other, more expensive, materials.

Glass

A traditional material which, provided it is kept clean, will look good for years. Glass is good acoustically meaning that it will make less noise with heavy rain is falling on it. Its clean finish looks good so long as you keep it clear of debris and mould and it will provide you with the most light through the roof of the car port.

However, glass is heavier than GRP and polycarbonate and so may be unsuitable if you are planning to install a lightweight frame. It's also much easier to break - particularly in periods of high wind when roof tiles might get dislodged and fall on it. That could lead to safety issues for those underneath or in close proximity.

Glass is also expensive when compared with other roof panel materials and may require the skills of a professional when it is installed.

Polycarbonate

This extremely versatile material can be tailored to your exact requirements - it can be opaque, translucent or have a coloured cast added. Polycarbonate is also strong and resists impact from debris falling from roofs meaning that it may be a good material to choose if you live in an area prone to high winds.

While more expensive than GRP, polycarbonate can be a very cost-effective material. It maintains its clean look over time thanks to its amazing durability and reflects heat more effectively than glass or GRP meaning that it will be cooler to sit underneath on very hot days. Polycarbonate has high weather and UV resistance meaning that maintenance will be minimal and it will retain a clean look for years.

Colour

Depending on what material you choose, some car ports can come in a range of colours. If you want your car port to blend in with the colour of your property, including its windows, walls or fascia, then a coloured design could be a more acceptable addition to your home. You are not restricted to colour, either. Some suppliers allow you to match the finish of the car port to that of your house with particular techniques used to simulate wood grains, metal or stone finishes.

Other elements

Gutters and downpipes

Having sheets of water falling off a car port during periods of heavy rainfall is not only inconvenient, it might actually cause structural problems as ground levels are washed away or undermined. Guttering and downpipes with either water capture or drainage will alleviate this problem and ensure that you stay dry when getting into or out of your vehicle.

Loadings

The weight of the car port is not the only loading you should consider when having one installed. Wind and snow can place considerable extra load on a car port and it is vital that you have these assessed properly if you are to ensure that the car port is both safe and has longevity.

Hail

It doesn't happen very often but during thunderstorms - particularly during the summer - the UK can experience intense hailstorms. Large hail can cause significant damage to outside structures with car ports being no exception. The roof panels are the most vulnerable to hail so it's important that these have high impact resistance and should be at least 16mm thick.

Planning permission and building regulations

Most car ports - particularly those that are attached to a property and open on at least two sides - will not usually require planning permission so long as the ground area being covered is not larger than 35 square metres.

However, there are some cases where you may need to seek planning consent before going ahead with the work. If your home is in a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, you will probably have to seek consent from your local authority. Likewise if your property is listed or within a conservation area. In some cases where a car port is planned to cover a space which immediately abuts a neighbour's house, it might be wise to consult your planning authority and discuss it with your neighbour before going ahead.

As with planning permission, you won't usually need to seek building regulations approval if your car port is going to cover an area of less than a certain sizes. In most cases this is 30 square metres. If you are planning to create new drainage channels to cope with runoff from the car port, then this may require building regulations approval.