

50plus Handyman



Installing a shower

50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick investigates how to go about installing a shower, the options and some of the pros and cons.

Shower Locations

Showers can be fitted in many locations including outside existing bathrooms. Broadly speaking they can be installed:

- **over an existing bath.** This is the traditional location and means either installing a shower screen or curtain to maintain access whilst preventing a flooded floor. If you are seeking a shower that pushes out plenty of water then both of these solutions have a tendency to allow water to escape and damp problems can result. If you have the space a better solution is
- **in a separate cubicle.** Shower enclosures come in large variety of sizes ranging from those it's just possible to squeeze into, to the luxuriously enormous. Enclosures are available pre-assembled, very useful for fitting into bedrooms and virtually guaranteed not to leak; as (typically glazed) assemblies ready to erect against one or more existing walls or can be constructed. The somewhat flexible plastic trays that used to be common had a habit of developing leaks after a few years so use a stone cast tray, especially upstairs. These provide a far more stable base for the cubicle sides. Water resistant panels (to tile over) have also become available and these greatly assist in providing longevity to a constructed cubicle. Also available now is sheet 'tiling' which both looks good and is far faster to install.

Types of shower

Broadly speaking showers can be categorised as:

- A simple integrated shower and mixer taps for installing on an existing bath
- Electric, with a water heater and pump and optional thermostatic control. Electrically heated showers need only a cold feed
- A separate mixer valve fed with hot and cold water. Mixer valves are available with either a manual or thermostatic temperature control and can be installed over a bath or in a separate shower cubicle. With this type of shower a separate pump to provide a high rate of flow is also an option.

Also available are shower pumps, either in an integrated unit that wall mounts or a separate pump to feed a mixer valve. Neither can be used with 'combi' boilers.



Your home – what to consider

In terms of cost the cheapest solution is the bath mixer tap with a hose mounted on the wall. How effective this is will depend on how good your water pressure is. If you have a modern combi boiler, which provides hot water at mains pressure then a good rate of flow is likely. If you have a traditional heating system with a header tank in the loft then the rate of flow will depend on how far the tank is above the shower head. You can judge how good the shower will be by how fast the water flows out of the taps, remembering the shower head will be a metre or so higher. Bath mixer showers start at around £30. Changing the bath taps can cost £70 or more, particularly if access is difficult.

A simple electric shower over the bath is a common purchase and prices typically range from £90. Remember however that water and power need to be fed to the shower, probably tiling undertaken and a screen fitted. Depending on the status of the existing plumbing and electrical systems an installation cost of £400 or more is not untypical.

With the space available for a separate cubicle then choose from a wide variety of enclosures and shower fittings. A separate pump to boost the flow rate is definitely worth considering. The mixer valve, pump, tray, enclosure and accessories will cost upwards of £600 and installation needs to be added on top, the cost will be heavily dependant on what is existing.

For the less mobile it is possible to install a ready built cubicle in a bedroom or other room. Drainage needs to be looked at carefully and some changes to electrical systems to meet safety regulations may be necessary but if you have such a need then a solution can usually be found.

Roger Runswick is a director of 50plus Handyman and a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. He can be contacted at roger.runswick@the50plus.co.uk.