
Timeline of a House

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Introduction Thanks for volunteering to help at a construction site. Your efforts will make a difference not only to one particular family in need of decent, affordable housing but also the whole neighborhood.

In this [Construction Volunteer How-To article](#) we discuss the timeline of a common type of volunteer-built house. Below is a description, in chronological order, of the principal events that take place in building such a house. As a volunteer you might find it useful to know what to expect on a particular job site at a particular stage.

We want you to be well-prepared. If you know you're scheduled for a particular activity such as siding, you'll be glad you read the pertinent article(s) listed at the bottom of this article, although we strongly urge you read the [Safety](#) article no matter what.

This timeline is meant to be a composite of several likely scenarios, not a perfect description of how to build any particular house. Please note the following.

- The events and procedures below can take place in somewhat different orders. You can't build the roof till after you've built the first floor, but you can sheathe it before or after you build the staircase.
- Almost always, more than one activity takes place at the same time.
- Several procedures always take place that are not listed below.
- On some houses some steps below don't take place at all.
- All the procedures below involve sub-procedures.
- None of the special terms below – sill plate, rim joist, soffit, etc. – are defined here, but several are defined, and some dimensions are given therefor, in the article titled [How To Measure and Mark](#).

Some of the procedures listed below are never performed by volunteers, some are always performed by volunteers, and the rest are sometimes performed by volunteers.

Clear the chosen lot as necessary.	Sometimes
Survey and stake the lot.	Never or rarely
Using such equipment as a front loader, a backhoe and a dump truck, dig the hole for the basement.	Never or rarely
Set the concrete forms and pour the concrete for the short, wide footer and then the tall, narrower foundation on top of that.	Never or rarely
Set the big, steel I-beam, also called the carrying beam, into pockets in the top of the concrete foundation, running through the middle from one end of the house to the other.	Never or rarely
Set Lally columns on the basement floor under that carrying beam to support it.	Always or almost
Attach wooden sill plates flat to the top of the foundation and to the top of the carrying beam.	Always or almost
Lay I-beam floor joists on edge across those sill plates.	Always or almost
Attach rim joists on edge across the ends of those floor joists.	Always or almost

Across the tops of those floor joists attach sheets of floor decking.	Always or almost
Using vertical studs attached top and bottom to horizontal plate, erect upon that floor the skeleton of the walls and then the roof.	Always or almost
Build an interior staircase.	Always or almost
Sheathe the roof with sheets of oriented strand board (OSB).	Always or almost
Attach fascia boards to the rafter tails.	Always or almost
Sheathe the outside walls with sheets of OSB.	Always or almost
Perform rough electrical work, rough heating, ventilation and cooling (HVAC) work, and rough plumbing work.	Never or rarely
Nail or staple moisture-barrier fabric, which comes in 9-foot rolls, to the outside wall sheathing.	Always or almost
Add tar paper to the roof.	Sometimes
Add shingles to the roof.	Never or rarely
Install doors and windows.	Always or almost
Install a garage door.	Never or rarely
Hang siding on the exterior walls and attach soffit under the eaves.	Always or almost
Trim out the exterior, including any porches, decks and staircases.	Almost or always
Inside, add insulation to the exterior walls.	Almost or always
Add drywall to the ceilings and then the walls.	Sometimes
Mud and tape the drywall.	Never or rarely
Add insulation to the attic.	Always or almost
Trim the doors and windows on the inside.	Always or almost
Add baseboard to the bottoms of the walls.	Always or almost
Install floor and wall cabinets in the kitchen and vanities in bathrooms.	Sometimes
Install and grout the floor and bathroom tile.	Always or almost
Perform finish electrical work, finish HVAC work, and finish plumbing work.	Never or rarely
Paint the interior, and the exterior if necessary.	Always or almost
Perform many other procedures inside to ready the house, such as installing skirt-boards and a handrail on the staircase, adding shelves and rods to the closets, and installing bathroom hardware.	Always or almost
Perform many other procedures outside to ready the house, from pouring the concrete driveway and seeding or sodding the lawn to attaching the mailbox and the house numbers to the front facade.	Always or almost
Sign your house (see below).	Always

Perpetual trash management. Throughout the process of volunteers' building a house – from the digging of the first shovelful of dirt to the last few frantic minutes before people start showing up early at the finished product for a house-blessing ceremony – all job sites generate trash. This means volunteers are often called upon to collect and transport trash.

While these two thankless trash tasks might not at first seem as symbolic as raising a wall or as satisfying as using a pneumatic palm nailer, they must be performed from time to time in order to make satisfactory progress. Work sites must be free of trash and clutter because that makes us safer and more efficient, so do jump in and consolidate any detritus you see lying around. If you see any sort of disorganized mess and you're qualified to organize it, do do so.

And every so often you might be asked to pull on work gloves and move large collections of debris from one place to another. Sometimes this means tossing it straight into a Dumpster, other times it means loading it into wheelbarrows or wheeled barrels or into the bed of a truck and then unloading it elsewhere. Sometimes it's bags of trash you've filled, sometimes it's brush and logs, and sometimes it's all sorts of construction leftovers. The point is that these tasks need to be performed just as much as any other in building house, and so we do thank you for everything you do. (Truth be told, a lot of volunteers find this sort of task quite enjoyable.)

Sign your house. Most of you who volunteer on a particular construction site will probably not attend any house-blessing ceremony (although you're certainly welcome to). But you can participate in a sense by continuing a tradition some organizations honor, which is to "sign your house."

Before you leave your house for the day, take an opportunity to grab a marker of some sort and leave a little secret message for everyone who will dwell therein and for history. Find a place that will eventually be covered up, such as a stud or the back side of a sheet of siding or drywall. Most people write the date and a short message and a signature, or they just write their initials, but you may sign your house any way you like.

Whether you came in at the beginning or the end of the timeline of a house, we hope you will think of it as yours.

How to . . . [Be safe on a job site](#)
[Useful miscellany](#)
[Use ladders](#)
[Measure and mark](#)
[Use a sledge hammer](#)
[Use a circular saw](#)
[Use a reciprocating saw](#)
[Use a nail gun](#)
[Attach housewrap](#)
[Attach siding](#)
[Attach drywall](#)
[Take a group photo](#)
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Thanks for volunteering on a construction job site, and we hope you find the experience pleasurable and educational and worthwhile. Your hard work and earnest efforts will help a deserving family afford a house you built, and that is always worthwhile.

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