

CALGARY CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

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# Before You Start

What to know before starting a renovation project

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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## After photos of backyard transformations in calgary — gravel vs grass vs pavers for low maintenance and clay soil drainage?

**For Calgary's challenging clay soil and extreme weather, gravel offers the best low-maintenance solution with superior drainage, while permeable pavers provide an attractive middle ground if budget allows.** Grass requires the most ongoing maintenance and struggles with our expansive clay soils and chinook freeze-thaw cycles.

Calgary's **bentonite clay soils** are notoriously difficult for drainage and landscaping. This expansive clay swells dramatically when wet and shrinks when dry, creating major challenges for any backyard surface. The key to success with any option is addressing drainage first through proper grading, potentially adding drainage tile, and amending the soil base.

**Gravel is your most practical choice** for Calgary conditions. It provides excellent drainage, handles freeze-thaw cycles without cracking, and requires minimal maintenance once properly installed. Expect to pay **\$8-15 per square foot** for a quality gravel installation including proper base preparation, landscape fabric, and 2-3 inches of decorative gravel. Popular options include pea gravel, river rock, or crushed granite. The key is proper base preparation — excavating 6-8 inches, installing landscape fabric, adding a compacted gravel base, then your decorative top layer. This creates a stable, well-draining surface that won't shift with Calgary's soil movement.

**Permeable pavers** offer the best of both worlds — attractive appearance with excellent drainage. Interlocking concrete pavers with sand joints or permeable pavers with gravel-filled joints handle water beautifully while providing a more finished look than loose gravel. Costs range **\$15-30 per square foot** installed, depending on the paver style and base preparation required. The investment pays off in durability and appearance, especially for entertaining areas. Proper installation requires excavating 8-12 inches, installing a compacted gravel base, sand leveling course, and the pavers themselves.

**Grass presents the biggest challenges** in Calgary's clay soil conditions. Our expansive clay doesn't drain well, leading to waterlogged conditions in spring and concrete-hard soil in summer. Chinook temperature swings stress grass roots, and snow mold is common after long winters under snow cover. If you choose grass, you'll need significant soil amendment — adding 2-4 inches of quality topsoil and compost, potentially installing drainage tile, and selecting hardy grass varieties like tall fescue or fine fescue blends. Expect **\$3-8 per square foot** for sod installation with proper soil preparation, but ongoing maintenance costs (watering, fertilizing, aerating, overseeding) add up quickly. Calgary's water restrictions during summer also limit irrigation options.

**Drainage is critical regardless of your choice.** Calgary's clay soils require proper grading away from your home's foundation (minimum 6-inch drop over 10 feet), and many properties benefit from French drains or drainage tile to

move water away from hardscaping areas. Poor drainage leads to ice buildup, surface flooding, and foundation issues.

For the most **low-maintenance approach**, consider a combination: gravel or permeable pavers for high-traffic areas and pathways, with drought-tolerant native plants and shrubs in planted areas. This reduces the surface area requiring maintenance while creating visual interest. Native options like buffalo grass, blue grama, or ornamental grasses handle Calgary's climate naturally.

**Professional installation is worth the investment** for any of these options. Proper excavation, base preparation, and drainage are crucial for long-term success in Calgary's challenging soil conditions. A qualified landscaper will assess your specific drainage needs and soil conditions to recommend the best approach for your property.

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## What's covered under anhwpp new home warranty if we find foundation cracks in year 8 in our okotoks build?

**Foundation cracks discovered in year 8 of your Okotoks home would potentially fall under the 10-year major structural defects coverage of your ANHWP warranty, but coverage depends on whether the cracks are deemed structural defects versus normal settling.**

Under Alberta's New Home Buyer Protection Act, your home is covered by **1-2-5-10 warranty insurance** through the Alberta New Home Warranty Program (ANHWP) or another approved warranty provider. The **10-year coverage specifically covers major structural defects**, which includes load-bearing components and foundation systems that affect the structural integrity of your home.

**What's typically covered under 10-year structural warranty:** Foundation cracks that compromise structural integrity, foundation settlement causing structural damage, foundation wall failure or bowing, and defects in load-bearing foundation elements. However, the key determination is whether the cracks represent a "major structural defect" that affects the home's structural integrity or safety. Minor cosmetic cracks from normal settling are generally not covered.

**Calgary area foundation considerations** are particularly relevant to your situation. Okotoks sits on similar expansive clay soils as Calgary, which naturally cause some foundation movement and minor cracking as the soil expands and contracts with moisture changes. The extreme freeze-thaw cycles from chinook weather also contribute to normal foundation stress. Your warranty provider will need to assess whether the cracks exceed what's considered normal for Alberta soil conditions.

**Coverage determination process** requires you to file a warranty claim with your warranty provider (check your warranty certificate to confirm if it's ANHWP, National Home Warranty, Progressive Home Warranty, or WBI Home Warranty). They'll send a qualified inspector to assess the cracks and determine if they represent a structural defect. The inspector will measure crack width, assess if they're growing, check for associated structural movement, and determine if repairs are needed for structural integrity.

**Your next steps:** Document the cracks with photos and measurements, contact your warranty provider immediately to file a claim (don't delay as there may be notice requirements), and avoid attempting repairs until the warranty inspection is complete. If the warranty provider denies coverage and you disagree, you can appeal their decision or seek an independent structural engineer's assessment. Keep in mind that warranty coverage has specific limits and may not cover 100% of repair costs, but it should cover necessary structural repairs if the cracks are deemed defects rather than normal settling.

The warranty claim process typically takes 30-90 days from filing to resolution, and Okotoks falls clearly within the service area for all major warranty providers operating in Alberta.

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## We're converting our old soaker tub into a double vanity setup — took 3 days and the extra counter space is a game changer?

**Converting a soaker tub to a double vanity is one of the smartest bathroom renovations you can make** — you've gained valuable storage and counter space while creating a more functional layout for daily use.

Your 3-day timeline sounds about right for a well-planned conversion. The process typically involves removing the tub and surrounding tile, capping or rerouting plumbing lines, installing new flooring where the tub was, and then setting up the vanity with new plumbing connections. The fact that you completed it quickly suggests good preparation and likely minimal plumbing complications.

**The extra counter space really is a game changer**, especially in Calgary homes where many master bathrooms from the 1980s-2000s featured oversized soaker tubs that rarely got used but dominated the space. Double vanities eliminate the morning rush bottleneck and provide dedicated storage for each person. You've essentially doubled your functional bathroom real estate.

From a **Calgary market perspective**, this renovation typically adds more value than it costs. Soaker tubs were trendy 20-30 years ago, but today's homeowners prioritize functionality and storage. Double vanities are now expected in master bathrooms, and your conversion brings the space up to current buyer expectations. In Calgary's competitive resale market, functional bathrooms with ample storage are major selling points.

**Plumbing considerations** for this type of conversion include ensuring proper venting for dual sinks and confirming your drain lines can handle the increased flow. In Alberta, any new plumbing connections require permits and inspection by accredited Safety Codes Officers — even if you did the work yourself, the rough plumbing should have been inspected before closing up walls.

**For other homeowners considering this conversion**, the key is planning the layout carefully. Measure twice to ensure adequate clearance between sinks (minimum 30 inches center-to-center), plan electrical for outlets between the sinks and proper lighting, and consider the flooring transition where the tub was removed. The investment typically runs \$3,000-\$8,000 depending on vanity quality and plumbing complexity — excellent return on investment for the functionality gained.

Your renovation reflects the shift in Calgary bathroom design toward practical luxury over statement pieces. Well done on maximizing your space!

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