

A TEN-MINUTE WALK AROUND YOUR OWN YARD

The “Will It Fit?” Backyard Field Guide

Before you call anyone, you can learn a surprising amount by walking your own property with this guide in hand. Here’s what to look for, what actually matters, and the few things that quietly make or break an ADU project.

HOW TO USE THIS

Grab a tape measure and your phone. Ten minutes.

California made it far easier to build an ADU than most homeowners realize — the state has overridden many of the local rules that used to block them. But every lot is different, and a handful of physical realities decide what's possible. This field guide walks you around your own backyard so you arrive at a real conversation already knowing the shape of the answer. Photograph as you go; those photos make your feasibility assessment faster and more precise.

None of this replaces a professional assessment — it just means you won't be starting from zero.

THE GOOD NEWS MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW

Under current California law, most single-family lots can add at least one ADU, and rules on minimum lot size, owner-occupancy, and parking have been loosened statewide. The question is usually not "am I allowed?" but "what fits, and where?"

01

Space — will a unit physically fit?

Walk the yard with a tape measure. You're looking for a buildable rectangle.

- ☐ **Find your open area**
Most backyard ADUs range from about 400 to 1,200 sq ft. Pace out the open space — a compact studio needs roughly a 20×25 ft footprint. Is there a clear patch that size?
- ☐ **Check the setbacks**
California generally requires about 4 feet from side and rear property lines for an ADU. Measure from your fence line inward — you'll lose roughly that much on each edge.
- ☐ **Mind the existing house**
Note the distance between where the ADU would go and your main home. There are spacing rules, and you'll want a sense of privacy for both.
- ☐ **Look up**
Overhead power lines, large tree canopies, and second-story windows overlooking the site all shape the design. Photograph anything overhead.

02 Access — can it actually be built?

The single most underestimated factor. Materials and equipment have to reach the site.

- ☐ **Trace the path from street to build site**
Can a small excavator, a concrete truck's reach, and material deliveries get to the backyard? Walk the route a wheelbarrow would take.
- ☐ **Measure your tightest pinch point**
The narrow side-yard gate or passage between house and fence is often the constraint. Measure its width — under 3 feet makes access harder and can affect cost.
- ☐ **Note what's in the way**
AC condensers, water heaters, sheds, mature trees, slopes. None are dealbreakers on their own, but each one is a factor.

03 Utilities — what's already close?

The nearer these are to your build site, the simpler and cheaper the connections.

- ☐ **Locate your sewer or septic**
Where does waste leave your property? The closer the ADU sits to that line, the shorter (and cheaper) the trenching.
- ☐ **Find your electrical panel**
Photograph the panel and its label. Its capacity (often 100 or 200 amps) affects whether it can carry a second dwelling or needs an upgrade.
- ☐ **Spot water and gas**
Note where the water meter and gas line enter. Distance to the ADU site is what matters.

04 The three quiet dealmakers

When a project is smooth and affordable, it's usually because of these.

- ≡ Flat and open beats large and sloped. A modest flat lot with easy access almost always builds cheaper than a big hillside one.
- ≡ Short utility runs save thousands. A build site near the existing connections is a quiet cost win.
- ≡ Good access is everything. If a truck can reach it, half the cost battles are already won.

YOUR FREE NEXT STEP

Send us your walk-around photos and KĒĒP's 48-hour feasibility assessment turns them into a real answer — what fits, where it goes, and a fixed all-in price for your exact lot. Free, no obligation, at keepadu.com.

General guidance only. ADU rules vary by city and lot; a professional feasibility assessment confirms what applies to your property.