

The Order: What to tell the Truss Plant for a simple job

Lead Time: A busy plant needs about two weeks lead time but may do a garage with a few days notice. You can book floating space on their calendar even if you don't know the exact date.

Length and quantity: Supply both dimensions of the building so the truss count can be checked. Remember there is one truss to start each row.

Spacing: Trusses are usually spaced 24" apart. Unless you live on a ski hill, 16" truss spacing isn't very useful. 48" spacing is economical on a farm type building.

Delivery: Where do you want the trusses brought?

The design load includes dead load (stuff built into the roof) and live load (stuff that comes and goes like rain and snow). The plant can figure the live load by knowing the elevation and location of the building site, or by asking the building inspector. If you have tile or gravel on the roof it will increase the dead load.

The span. This is usually the outside-to-outside measurement of the support walls. Truss price depends on span. Span depends on how long the bottom boards are, not on how far apart the walls of your house are. If the ceiling line continues outside the walls, you have a "cantilever" or "level soffit". Be sure to mention this.

The slope (or pitch) is inches per foot expressed as 4/12 or 7/12, for example. 4/12 is sometimes called a "one in three" pitch. Slopes steeper than 7/12 make it hard to walk on the roof. Slopes less than 2.5/12 may be expensive to stiffen up. Is the roofing you want to use rated for the slope you want? In Canada, basic shingles shouldn't be used below 4/12 and clay tiles below 6/12. A flat roof usually has to be sloped to the drains and this can get complicated.

A Tail is how far the top board extends past the end of the bottom board. How many inches do tails stick out, measured horizontally? Are the ends cut plumb or square? The tail will be cut plumb if you don't specify otherwise. If you say the tails are "2 feet", the plant will probably cut them 22.5 inches, allowing for a 1-1/2" board nailed across the ends.

Gables: Gables are shaped like a truss, have studs to nail plywood to, and sit on the end walls. If there is no wall under the gable, it has to be made structural. Do you want the gable dropped (usually 3.5") for lookouts?

Match existing: It is tricky to match additions to the existing structure, and usually involves a site visit.

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