

Asphalt Shingle Success

12 Field-Ready Tips for Installing Asphalt Shingles

The Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA, www.asphaltroofing.org) has a wealth of information available about asphalt roofing recommended practices. ARMA has prepared many technical bulletins and the Residential Asphalt Roofing Manual to aid roofers in the proper installation of various asphalt roofing systems. Here are some important tips for the successful installation of asphalt shingles.

1 Follow manufacturer instructions and local building codes

The first place you should look for shingle installation guidance is the instructions from the asphalt shingle manufacturer. You must always check local building codes.

2 Start with a solid deck

Your shingles are only as good as what's underneath. Before anything else, make sure the roof deck is flat, free of defects, and clear of debris. Any warps or gaps should be fixed before you install underlayment or shingles.

3 Lay underlayment flat and smooth

Different types of underlayment (self-adhering, synthetic, or saturated felt) require different application practices. Follow the directions for that material. Avoid wrinkles or buckles in underlayment, which may reduce performance and create uneven surfaces. Always install underlayment without folds and ensure seams are properly sealed when needed.

4 Use a proper starter course

Don't skip the starter course. It helps anchor the first row of shingles, gives



Pneumatic roofing nailer.
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cleaner edges, and improves wind resistance at the eaves. Manufacturers consider it a necessary element—not an option.

5 Stick to the recommended shingle layout (unless allowed otherwise)

Manufacturers provide layout patterns for each product for proper installation. ARMA recommends against “racking” (vertical alignment of joints) unless the product is approved for that installation method. Instead, offset successive courses to avoid vertical alignment of joints.

6 Keep exposures and rows consistent

Small deviations in exposure add up over a long slope. Use chalk or snap lines to keep every course aligned. If your exposure shifts a small amount on each course, alignment can be off significantly by the time you reach the ridge. Tight tolerances contribute to consistent, high-

quality results.

7 Flash details properly

Flashings are your roof's defense against leaks at walls, dormers, chimneys, and vent pipes. Flashings must stand the test of time. Use metals that resist corrosion, and size them so water is directed safely away from vulnerable joints and intersections. Use step flashing, counter flashing, and proper integration with shingles. Install each piece under shingle courses in a way that channels water off the roof. Avoid nailing the vertical face of flashing at wall intersections to permit movement between the roof and wall. ARMA's manual gives guidance on recommended placements and sizes for flashings.

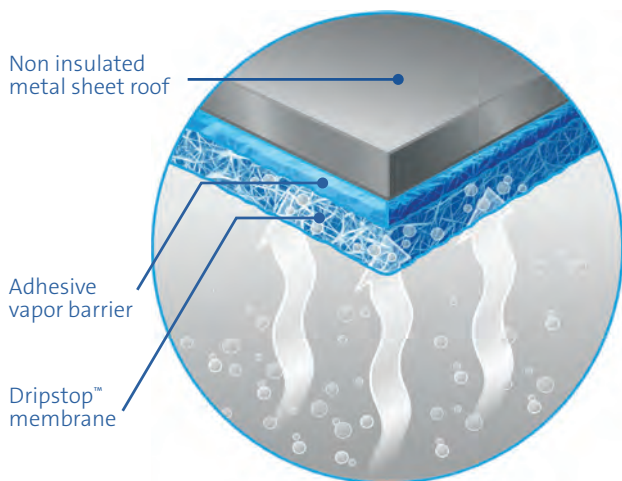
8 Design valleys carefully

Valleys are high-risk zones. Manufacturers provide guidance with several acceptable methods (open, closed, woven). Regardless of method, make sure

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to pay attention to the details specific to the valley type being installed.

9 Drive nails correctly

Nailing errors are a leading cause of issues. ARMA technical bulletins provide recommendations, including:

- Nails must be corrosion-resistant (galvanized, stainless, aluminum)
- Minimum shank diameter: 12 gauge (0.105 inch)
- Minimum head diameter: 3/8 inch
- Nails should penetrate at least 3/4 inch into the roof deck (or through the deck if thinner)
- Drive them flush—not overdriven or underdriven
- For standard applications, most shingles use four nails per shingle, unless the manufacturer says otherwise
- For applications in high wind areas, the shingle manufacturer may have special instructions
- Improper nailing contributes to blow-offs, raised tabs, and seal failures.

10 Plan for waste and complex geometry

Trim, cuts, dormers, hips, valleys—all result in waste. Waste allowances could

be anywhere from 2% to 10%, depending on roof complexity. Make sure your initial material order accounts for that so you don't run short mid-job.

11 Work penetrations and solar mounts smartly

With more roofs adding solar and mechanical penetrations, proper flashing design is critical. Keep penetrations minimal, place them where flashing can be robust, and account for thermal movement.

12 Inspect and maintain after installation

After installation and over the life of the roof, inspect flashings, seals, and areas prone to wear. Regular maintenance prolongs life.

BONUS TIP: Cold-Weather Installation

- Guidance for cold-weather installs:
- Handle shingles gently in the cold—they can crack or break under stress.
 - Shingles need to be flexible enough to use without damaging them. If necessary, store bundles indoors before use to keep them flexible.

• In very cold conditions, hand-sealing shingles with approved roofing cement may be needed.

WARNING: Working on a roof can be dangerous. ARMA reminds those engaged in roofing work to follow applicable safety regulations and safe work practices, including the use of all appropriate safety equipment.

Why These Tools Align With ARMA Guidance

- ARMA stresses proper nailing as one of the most critical performance factors. Having tools that ensure nails are placed and driven correctly is fundamental.
- Flashing and trim details are crucial for water shedding, so bending tools, caulk guns, and measuring tools become necessary for clean, durable transitions.
- Deck prep and cleanup are explicitly in ARMA's materials, so tools that aid tear-off and debris removal help meet those expectations.
- Safe and careful handling of shingle bundles (especially in heat) is part of ARMA's storage and handling recommendations, which means lifting and handling gear matters on site. **PB**

10 Tools Most Helpful for Installing Asphalt Shingle Roofs (Per ARMA)

1. Pneumatic roofing nailer (or properly adjusted pneumatic tool)

ARMA's Nail Application of Asphalt Strip Shingles states that "all nails are to be driven by hand or with a pneumatic nailing tool that has been properly adjusted to drive the nails correctly."

Getting the right drive ensures nails are flush—not over-driven or under-driven—which is critical to shingle performance and wind resistance.

2. Hand hammer (for spot nailing or adjusting nails)

Even when using pneumatic tools, some nails may have

to be adjusted by hand ("Under-driven nails can be tapped down. Remove overdriven or crooked nails ... and place another nail nearby.")

A hammer is useful for finishing nails or correcting misfires.

3. Chalk line / snap line

For keeping shingle courses straight and aligned, ARMA's manual describes snapping horizontal chalk lines



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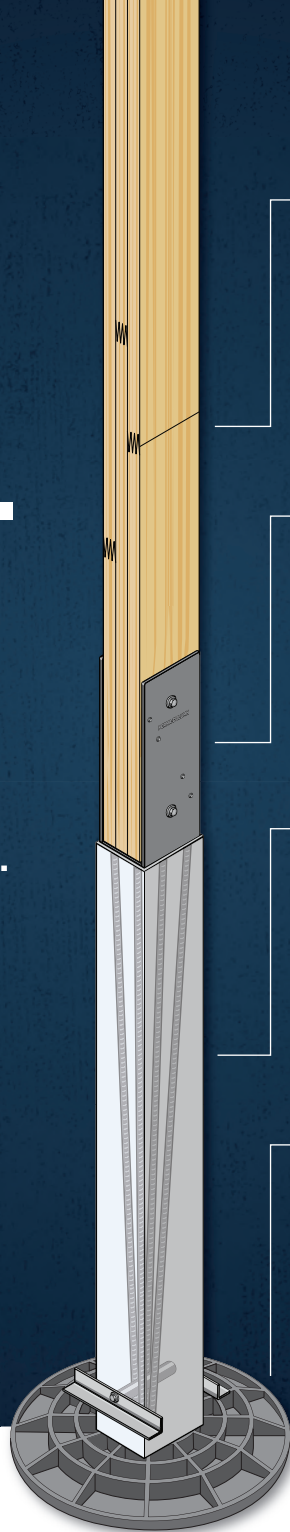
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parallel to the eaves and centerlines on long runs to split courses symmetrically.

This tool helps maintain consistent exposure and alignment across the roof slope.



4. Utility knife / roofing knife / hook blade knife

Cutting shingles for trim, hips, rakes, and valleys requires a sharp, durable knife. ARMA's installation chapters frequently refer to trimming shingles and shaping cutouts (especially in valleys, dormers, and flashing areas).

A good knife reduces tearing, ensures clean edges, and helps with fit around penetrations.

5. Drip edge / flashing bending tool or brake

Shingle systems require drip edge along eaves and rakes, as well as custom flashing at walls, chimneys, and other intersections (the ARMA manual devotes a full chapter to flashing).

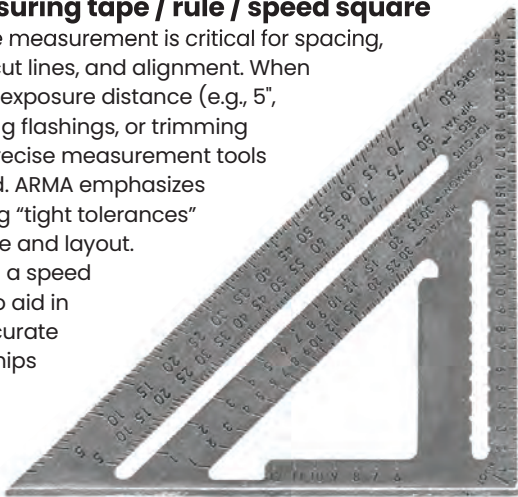
To fabricate drip edges or bend flashing materials to correct angles, a brake or bending tool is indispensable.



6. Measuring tape / rule / speed square

Accurate measurement is critical for spacing, exposure, cut lines, and alignment. When setting the exposure distance (e.g., 5", 6"), installing flashings, or trimming shingles, precise measurement tools are needed. ARMA emphasizes maintaining "tight tolerances" on exposure and layout.

Tools like a speed square also aid in cutting accurate angles for hips and ridges.



7. Roofing shovel / tear-off shovel / shingle remover tool

In roof replacement jobs, ARMA's manual includes instructions on stripping old roofing down to the deck and cleaning the deck before new application.

A roofing shovel or tear-off tool helps remove old shingles, underlayment, and debris efficiently.



8. Broom / roof broom / blower (for deck cleanup)

Before installing underlayment or shingles, the deck must be clean and free of debris, fastener protrusions, and loose material. ARMA's manual instructs sweeping the deck clean after tear-off.

A sturdy broom or blower ensures the deck surface is smooth and ready for underlayment.

9. Caulking gun / sealant or roofing cement applicator

ARMA's flashing and detail instructions often require applying asphalt roof cement or compatible sealant at flashing edges and cutouts.

A caulking gun or controlled applicator allows accurate dispensing of sealant where needed.



10. Bundle lifting / handling equipment (roof dolly, hoist, safety line, ladder setup)

While ARMA's manuals don't call out brand names, they do emphasize safety, proper handling of bundles, and avoiding bending or damaging shingles. For example, in hot-weather storage guidance, ARMA warns that shingles become more flexible and must be handled carefully to avoid damage.

Tools for safely lifting and placing bundles (e.g., roof hoists, hoisting rope systems, material handling carts) help preserve shingle integrity and improve installation efficiency. **PB**

