



**RAINMAKERS** Testers simulate rainfall on one of the roof systems built for this report.

# Gutter guards

## Do-it-yourself systems beat the pros

**S**YSTEMS THAT PROMISE to keep your gutters leaf-free can easily cost thousands of dollars. But our 16 months of outdoor testing show that a low-priced screen may be all it takes to keep out leaves and other debris.

We tested professionally installed and do-it-yourself products sold at Home Depot, Lowe's, and other major retailers to see how well they kept out maple leaves, pine needles, and other gutter-cloggers. We also simulated heavy showers and rain-dumping storms to make sure those systems help capture water so that it flows toward downspouts and away from your home's foundation, rather than pooling there and seeping into the basement.

Our testers saw some big differences among types. We also found that some of those systems could leave you with clogged gutters, cascading rainwater, or both. Here are our results:

**Pros disappoint in a downpour.** Most of the professionally installed systems use a surface-tension design, where water is supposed to cling to the surface and flow into the gutters while leaves pass over and fall to the ground. Though all

were impressive at shedding debris, even the top-scoring LeafFilter screen was only middling at containing a severe downpour. The Waterloo let heavy rainfall pour over.

**Convenience costs.** At \$20 to \$30 per foot, the pro-installed systems we tested would cost \$3,000 to \$5,000 for the roughly 160 feet needed on an average-sized

home. The price usually includes free service calls if your gutters ever clog—a plus because cleaning out clogs usually means removing the guard. But you'll pay less than \$100 if you install the CR Best Buy Amerimax 85198 or 854054 yourself. You'll still save thousands even if you add in the roughly \$100 to \$500 a contractor will charge to put in a do-it-yourself system.

**Some inserts underwhelm.** Most do-it-yourself gutter guards were easy to install. For inserts, you simply cut the foam or bend the brush and press it into the gutter. But none of the inserts were good at keeping out debris. The Raingo let water pour out over the sides of the gutter.

### How to choose

Even if you decide to leave your gutters as is, make sure that drains extend 5 feet from the house and that the ground near the foundation slopes at least 1 inch per foot for 6 feet or more to carry away water. Then keep these other points in mind:

**Inspect the rest of the gutters.** Have a pro check them for clogs, corrosion, broken fasteners, proper pitch, and gaps between connections and between gutters and fascia boards. The LeafGuard and K-Guard are all-in-one systems that include the gutters and guards, an option if your existing gutters are worn.

**Pick the right screen.** Fine-mesh screens like the top-scoring LeafFilter and Gutterglove Pro outperformed screens with larger holes. But the Gutterglove was relatively pricey and hard to install and isn't meant for flat or gambrel roofs.

**Check the fine print.** Be sure that any system won't void a roof or gutter war-

### ▶ CLOSE UP

## Think twice about tossing your gutters

The Rainhandler Plus, about \$4.40 per foot, trades gutters for "maintenance-free" angled louvers that deflect drops "away from your home, where they fall harmlessly to the ground." We first tested this gutter alternative in 1997 and found that it met those promises for leaves and heavy rain, which it deflected far enough away to prevent pooling below. But it didn't deflect lighter rain as far, raising the risk that water finds its way into basements if the ground around the foundation isn't properly sloped. We got the same results this time.

**Bottom line.** The Rainhandler Plus might be OK if the ground around your home's foundation slopes at least 1 inch per foot



for 6 feet or more and you haven't had water leaks in your basement or home. But you'll find gutter-guard systems that are better at capturing water for far less.

ranty. Also check suggested maintenance. Some systems call for periodic hosing from the ground. LeafFilter may need brushing in high-pollen areas and Amerimax must be checked for debris; both of those steps mean climbing a ladder or calling a pro.

**Play it safe.** Ladder injuries are linked to approximately 200 to 300 deaths and an estimated 200,000 emergency-room visits each year. Use a sturdy Type 1A extension ladder made of fiberglass if you're working near electrical lines. Extend it 3 feet be-

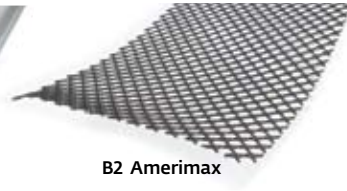
yond the roof and angle it 75 degrees from the ground (1 foot for every 4 feet high). Always face the ladder when climbing and descending. And never go beyond the highest recommended step or reach more than 1 foot to either side of the ladder.



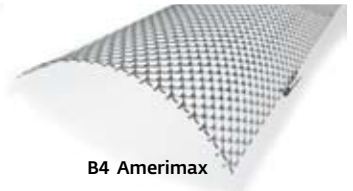
A2 Gutter Topper



B1 Gutterglove Pro



B2 Amerimax



B4 Amerimax

**Overview**

The best systems kept out debris while keeping in rainwater. But even the best pro-installed products let some water pour over during our simulated severe storms.

- CR Best Buy**  
These offer the best blend of performance and value. All are recommended.
- Recommended**  
These products performed well overall and stand out for the reasons listed below.

**Best among pro-installed systems:**

- A1 LeafFilter** \$20 per foot
- A2 Gutter Topper** \$23 per foot
- A3 LeafGuard** \$30 per foot

All of these pro-installed systems were Excellent at keeping out debris, Very Good at containing heavy rainfall, and Good at containing severe rainfall. Prices include installation. A fine-mesh design helped **A1** do slightly better than surface-tension systems. **A3** includes gutters.

**Top picks for do-it-yourselfers:**

- B1 Gutterglove Pro** \$8.95 per foot
- B2 Amerimax** 30 cents per foot **CR Best Buy**
- B3 Amerimax** \$3.95 per foot
- B4 Amerimax** 40 cents per foot **CR Best Buy**
- B5 Raindrop** \$4.75 per foot

These do-it-yourself systems were Excellent at containing heavy and severe rainfall and at least Very Good at keeping out debris. They can also be installed by a contractor. Prices are for materials only; figure on an additional \$100 to \$500 for installation on an average-sized house. A fine-mesh design helped **B1** keep out debris better than the other screens. But as with **B3**, installing it involves some work. **B2** and **B4** trade some buildup resistance for low prices and easy installation.

**Guide to the Ratings**

**Overall score** is mainly ability to prevent buildup and handle simulated heavy and severe rainfall, and (for do-it-yourself systems) ease of installation. Displayed scores are rounded; products are listed by precise overall score. **Buildup** is based on leaves and other debris over 16 months outside with no upkeep. **Heavy flow** is ability to contain equivalent of 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 inches per hour of water over typical

roof section. **Severe flow** is ability to contain equivalent of 6 to 7 1/2 inches per hour (short bursts in a thunderstorm based on National Weather Service data). **Ease of installation** includes need for cutting, drilling, and other work. **Price per foot** is price we paid for product and installation for pro products and, for do-it-yourself systems, approximate retail for product only.

# Ratings Gutter guards

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price per ft.	Type	Overall score	Test results			
						Buildup	Heavy flow	Severe flow	Ease of installation
<b>A PRO-INSTALLED</b> These include installation and, often, free clog-clearing, but they're pricey.									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LeafFilter <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>	\$20	Screen (fine mesh)	86	●	●	○	NA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Gutter Topper <sup>1</sup>	23	Surface tension	80	●	●	○	NA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LeafGuard <sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>	30	Surface tension	80	●	●	○	NA
	4	K-Guard <sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>	23	Surface tension	73	●	●	○	NA
	5	Gutter Helmet <sup>1</sup>	20	Surface tension	67	●	●	○	NA
	6	Waterloov <sup>1</sup>	20	Surface tension	56	●	●	●	NA
<b>B HOMEOWNER-INSTALLED</b> These can also be installed by a contractor, and they cost much less.									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Gutter glove Pro <sup>1</sup>	8.95	Screen (fine mesh)	89	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Amerimax 85198 <sup>2</sup>	0.30	Screen	86	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Amerimax 85246 <sup>1</sup>	3.95	Screen	84	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Amerimax 854054 <sup>1</sup>	0.40	Screen	80	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Raindrop <sup>2</sup>	4.75	Screen	77	●	●	●	●
	6	Amerimax 85270 <sup>2</sup>	0.50	Screen	66	●	●	●	●
	7	The WaterFall <sup>2</sup>	2.65	Surface tension	66	○	●	●	●
	8	Leaf Pro XL <sup>1</sup>	3.45	Surface tension	62	●	●	○	●
	9	GutterFill SCALLSEA5K	4.20	Foam insert	46	●	●	●	●
	10	Leaf Defier XL	5.65	Foam insert	46	●	●	●	●
	11	Raingo RW115 <sup>2</sup>	1.05	Screen	46	●	●	●	●
	12	GutterStuff	4.05	Foam insert	44	●	●	○	●
	13	GutterBrush	3.75	Brush insert	44	●	●	●	●
<b>C OPEN GUTTER WITHOUT A GUARD</b> (For comparison)									
		Unprotected gutter	NA	Conventional	27	●	●	○	NA

<sup>1</sup> Metal. <sup>2</sup> Plastic. <sup>3</sup> Includes integrated gutters.