


# Ask the Builder®

by **Tim Carter** Nationally Syndicated Newspaper Columnist



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## Gutter Guard

By  
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**DEAR TIM:** I have read your past columns about gutter guards. You seem to have tested many, but are still not satisfied. I have the same problems you have with year-round debris from my trees, and spring is indeed the worst time. What is the best gutter cover? The mesh-type gutter guard seems like it has the most promise. Do you agree? Jackie B., Royal Oak, MI

**DEAR JACKIE:** Millions of homeowners suffer like you and I. Gutter cleaning is a maintenance issue that is both a hassle and can be dangerous. In fact, I know of a person who died falling from a ladder while performing gutter cleaning. Why tempt Mother Nature's law of gravity when some product can be installed that would eliminate the need to get up and clean gutters?

As you pointed out, for years I have been testing many different gutter guards. Some have done well, others not so well and quite a few have failed miserably. The common problem is the gutter guard products get choked by small debris like tree blossoms, seed pods, pine needles, twigs and pieces of bark. If the gutter covers don't get clogged, then certain designs allow much of this debris to get carried into the gutter where it turns into layer after layer of organic muck.

Over the years, I have waged email, phone and traditional mail battles with inventors of gutter protection products. They bristle at my facts about how many of the manufacturers of gutter guards make "No Maintenance" claims. In other words, many people who sell these products tell homeowners that once installed, the homeowner will never have to clean the gutters, get up on their roofs, etc. That claim is 100 percent false in my opinion. My nearly ten years of testing gutter guards has produced copious amounts of data to support my claim. I often get letters and emails from gutter cleaning companies that further substantiate my claims.

The bottom line is that no matter what gutter guard you install, you will have to maintain it. The hardest part of the job is cleaning the organic muck out of the gutter. This means you either have to completely stop the small organic debris from getting into the gutter or you must install a gutter protection product that allows you easy access to the inside of the gutter.

For years, I was a fan of an inexpensive plastic gutter guard that had small diamond knockout holes in it. This design was not bad, but it did allow some debris to enter the gutter. One other issue was the fact

that it allowed maple-tree seed pods to get stuck in the holes. The seed would drop through the guard, but the wing stuck straight up in the air. It was a nightmare cleaning thousands of these out of the gutter guard.



This gutter guard has been undergoing testing for ten months. So far it has done very well. PHOTO CREDIT: Tim Carter

But the holes did allow me to spray water into the gutter to get rid of the muck. Keep in mind though, this had to be done standing on the roof or from a ladder. There are tools that spray water into gutters from the ground, but you do so blind not knowing if the gutter is really clean.

Then I tested the large plastic-mesh gutter guards. These were easy to remove, but they required too much work to remove, flush the gutter and then reinstall. Once again, I was on the roof or a ladder doing this maintenance.

I had just about given up hope when last year a company contacted me saying they had the solution. If I had a dollar for every time I have heard that line, I could take my family out to a very nice dinner. Once I was sent a sample, their product was the most unique gutter guard I had ever seen. It is made from one-eighth-thick extruded aluminum that has a stainless-steel micro-mesh screen on top of it. The gutter guard is practically indestructible.



What I like most about this newer gutter guard is that absolutely no organic debris can get into the gutter as the micro mesh has openings that are smaller than the tip of a needle. Even though the openings are so small, the mesh easily permits large amounts of water to flow through it into the gutter.

I installed this gutter guard product just after all the leaves had fallen last autumn. I got up on my roof and washed out the gutter of all debris with a garden hose. After nine months, I am proud to say my gutter is still perfectly clean. The gutter guard is doing a fantastic job. The best part is the manufacturer actually tells the truth. They tell homeowners that they will have to periodically clean dried organic debris from the top of the gutter guard. A scrub brush on the end of an extendable fiberglass or aluminum pole allows you to do this from the ground without having to get on a ladder.

This new gutter guard is usually installed by a professional dealer. The guard slides up under the first row of shingles and the front edge is screwed to the front lip of the gutter. It is invisible from the ground.

I took monthly photographs of the organic debris that started to pile up on the gutter cover. In many areas, the debris got worse and worse. But every now and then a strong wind would blow a small amount of it off the gutter cover. My best estimate is that 80 percent of the debris that has dropped onto the roof and gutter guard since it was installed is still there. But even with this debris on the cover, rain water flows under it, through the mesh and into the gutter. For testing purposes, I did not brush off the debris from the ground, although I could have at any time.

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