Prepare the Site

A properly prepared site is critical to a good quality installation and the long term structural stability of the home.

This chapter explains the process of planning the site, evaluating the soil, and preparing the site for construction of the home's support system.

Follow the Steps below:

STEP 1. PLAN SITE ACCESS

Planning the route to the site is typically the responsibility of the retailer or transportation company. Whoever is responsible must secure state permits from the states through which the home will pass.

In planning the route, avoid obstructions that might interfere with the passage of the home, such as low hanging wires and trees, low overpasses, and bridges not suitable for the load. Contact the utility company if wires need to be moved. Do not allow branches, bushes, or other foliage to scrape against the home as the home is moved to the site. Avoid ditches, berms, steep slopes, and soft ground. Identify and fill any holes and soft spots into which the transporter's wheels may sink. Avoid moving over steep changes in grade (20 degrees or more).

If required, provide for home storage and staging areas on the site. Plan the delivery and staging of home sections and materials so that after all deliveries are complete, home sections and materials can be accessed for use and installed in the appropriate sequence. Orient home sections so they do not have to be rotated or excessively maneuvered during the installation process. Plan for temporary needs, such as dumpsters, portable toilets, crew parking, delivery vehicle drop-offs and concrete mixer deliveries.

Before moving the manufactured home to the site, inform the LAHJ and make sure the site is prepared and utilities are available.

Site Preparation. The home manufacturer has no control over the site planning and installation of the home unless the manufacturer is responsible for the home's installation. Final responsibility for site preparation, including soil stability and frost heave control, lies with the installer. An improperly prepared site may result in the denial of a foundation-related warranty claim.

STEP 2. DETERMINE HOME LOCATION AND LAYOUT

The home location may have already been determined by others. If not, plan the home location and layout in compliance with the regulations researched in **Getting Started**, **STEP 5. CHECK LOCAL CODES AND SECURE PERMITS** (p. 13). Contact utilities for locations of existing infrastructure, such as underground cables, pipes, and electrical lines.

When planning the site improvements, consider the following:

- The home location should be level.
- Avoid contact with large trees, steep slopes, poorly drained areas, and potential flood zones.
- Preserve trees and shrubs for shade, visual screens, and windbreaks.
- Plan the driveway, parking areas, septic, well, other structures, and utility lines.

Fire separation. Comply with any LAHJ fire separation requirements or the requirements NFPA 501A, 2003 edition (Chapter 6).

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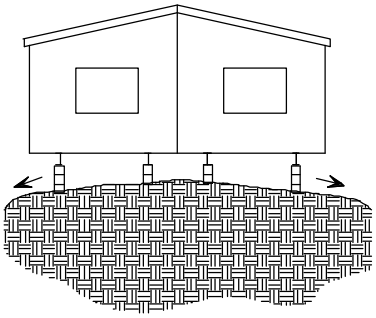
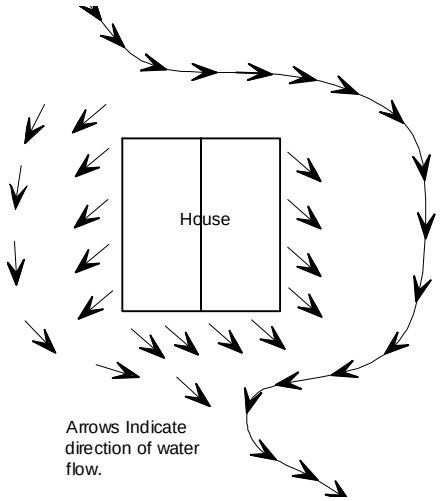
- Consider future additions, such as screen rooms, porches, and awnings.
- Site the home away from natural water paths.

STEP 3. CLEAR AND GRADE THE SITE

Trim overhanging foliage considering future growth, potential storms, swaying in wind and snow/ice-weighted branches. Remove organic material such as vegetation, wood, roots, twigs, dead branches, grass, and brush from directly under the home. Remove any debris that could become termite infested from the site and surrounding area. Remove all other debris from the home location, including roots from beneath footing locations. Properly dispose of all items.

Crown the site (**Figure 4**) away from the foundation for the first ten feet with a minimum slope of 1/2 inch per foot. Where property lines, walls, slopes, or other physical conditions prohibit this slope, provide the site with drains, swales, or grading to drain water away from the structure. Any fill required to grade the site should be inorganic "controlled fill" applied in a maximum of four inch layers, compacted between each layer to at least 90% of its maximum relative density. Direct runoff away from the site using ditches and berms (**Figure 5**). If the home will have skirting, start grading from two feet in from the edge of the home.





Grade the ground so that water under porches, decks, and recessed entries flows away from the home. If proper grading is not possible, use other methods such as a drain tile and automatic sump pump system to remove any water that may collect under the home.

The home is suitable for the installation of gutters and downspouts. When gutters and downspouts are installed, direct runoff away from the home.

STEP 4. DETERMINE SOIL CONDITIONS

Examine the soil type under the proposed home location to make sure it is suitable for placement of a home. The design of the home's support system, including footing/pier spacing and size, will in part be determined by the bearing capacity of the soil, and if ground anchors are used, by the soil's withdrawal strength.

The soil under every portion of the support system must meet the following criteria:

- The soil must be firm and undisturbed (not previously excavated) or fill compacted to at least 90% of its maximum relative density. Uncompacted fill will settle over time, causing the home to shift and become unlevel.
- Fill must not contain large debris. This too will settle over time.
- The soil must not be comprised of organic clays or peat. Organic material can decay, causing settlement, and also may harbor pests that can infest the home.

Site drainage. Moisture under the home can result in structural damage to the floor system and other parts of the home. Failure to provide adequate slope/drainage can result in moisture-related problems such as mold, mildew, and erosion.

Figure 4. *Crown the soil under the home to prevent water ponding*

Figure 5. *Direct runoff away from the home*

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Soil. Inadequate soil bearing capacity or a support system mismatched to the soil characteristics can result in excessive or differential settlement of the home, which can cause the home to go out of level, resulting in jammed doors and windows, cracks in finishes and ruptured plumbing connections.

- The water table must be below the lowest level of the planned support system/foundation. A soil's bearing capacity can be greatly reduced when it is saturated with water. Note that water tables may vary with seasonal or climactic conditions. Consult a geologist or the LAHJ if you are unsure of the water table level.
- The soil must not be a highly expansive type. Expansive soils can expand when they become saturated with water, causing the home to shift and become unlevel. If soils are expansive, contact a registered engineer, or registered architect to assist with the design of the foundation system.

Does the soil meet these criteria?

► **YES**, go to **STEP 5, DETERMINE SOIL BEARING CAPACITY AND FROST LINE,** (p. 16).

► **NO**, Consult a registered engineer, registered architect, or geologist to determine a suitable soil bearing capacity.

STEP 5. DETERMINE SOIL-BEARING CAPACITY AND FROST LINE

The soil under a home must be capable of withstanding the loads imposed by the weight of the home, its support system and furnishings, as well as any loads imposed by wind, snow, or other climactic conditions.

SOIL-BEARING CAPACITY

Determine the soil-bearing capacity in pounds per square foot (psf) before designing a support system. The higher the capacity (psf), the more weight the soil can hold without unduly compressing. As the soil-bearing capacity increases, footings can be reduced in size or spaced farther apart.

Use one or more of the following methods to determine the site's soil bearing capacity:

- **Test the soil.** Hire a registered geologist, registered engineer, or registered architect to determine the soil classification and maximum allowable soil bearing capacity by testing the soil in accordance with generally accepted engineering practice.
- **Obtain soil records.** The local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (www.soils.usda.gov) and/or the LAHJ may have test results and/or soil analyses on file for the area.
- **Conduct a pocket penetrometer test.** Use a pocket penetrometer to estimate allowable soil-bearing capacity as follows:
  1. Select a location that will be under a footing.
  2. Clear an area of a minimum of one square foot at least four inches deep or to the depth of the bottom of the planned footing.
  3. Using the instructions provided with the pocket penetrometer, take at least five readings.
  4. Discard the high and low readings and average the remaining readings. Round this result down to the nearest soil-bearing value shown in the right column of **Table 4**.
  5. Confirm that the rounded result matches the soil description on **Table 4.**
- **Determine soil-bearing value by visual examination.** If one of the options above is not available, the values on **Table 4** can be used to establish soil-bearing capacity by visual examination. This method provides lower capacity values than the options above. Accurate soil identification typically requires special training or expertise. An engineer or building code official may be able to assist in classifying the soil found on the site.

Soil bearing capacity. Support systems on soils with bearing capacities less than 1,000 psf must be designed by a registered engineer or registered architect and approved by the LAHJ.

Limitations of pocket penetrometers. Pocket penetrometers do not work on sand or gravel. Use **Table 4** to determine allowable pressure for these types of soils. If you encounter a layer of gravel, test the soil under the gravel. Do not put the penetrometer on stones larger than its tip as this will provide an inaccurate reading.

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TABLE 4. SOIL-BEARING CAPACITY BY SOIL TYPE

Soil Type (and classification)	Allowable Pressure (psf)
Rock or hard pan (class 1)	4,000
Sandy gravel and gravel; very dense and/or cemented sands; course gravel/cobbles; preloaded silts, clays and coral (class 2)	2,000
Sand; silty sand; clayey sand; silty gravel; medium dense course sands; sandy gravel; very stiff silt, sand clays (class 3)	1,500
Clay, sandy clay, silty clay, clayey silt (classes 4A and 4B)	1,000
Un-compacted fill, peat, organic clays (class 5)	Professional testing required

Note to table: No allowances made for overburden pressure, embedment depth, water table height, or settlement problems.

- **Use default capacity.** Use an allowable pressure of 1,500 psf, unless site-specific information requires the use of lower values based on soil classification and type according to **Table 4**.

Note that soil types may vary across a home site. In this case, the soil with the lowest bearing capacity should be assumed when designing the support system. Keep a record of the soil-bearing capacity value; it will be used later to design the home's support system.

FROST LINE

In climates subject to ground freezing, obtain the the local design frost depth for footings from one of the following:

- The local authority having jurisdiction (LAHJ)
- Consult with a registered architect or engineer
- Use Figure 6 map.

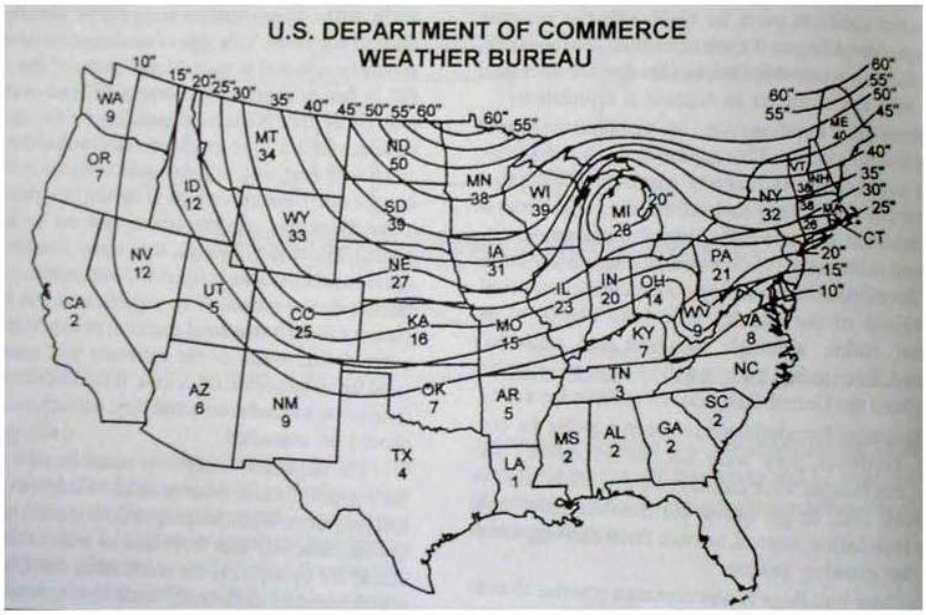

Figure 6. *Average frost penetration depth (in inches)*

Will this installation use auger-type ground anchors?

- ► **YES**, go to **STEP 6, DETERMINE GROUND ANCHOR HOLDING CAPACITY,** (p. 18).
- ► **NO**, go to **Construct Foundation,** (p. 33).

STEP 6. DETERMINE GROUND ANCHOR HOLDING CAPACITY

When using auger-type ground anchors to tie down the home, first, use a torque probe to determine the anchor-holding strength of the soil on the site.

Use a torque probe with a shaft of sufficient length to test the soil at the depth of the anchor helical plate. Augur the probe into the ground, and following the probe manufacturer's instructions, take the torque wrench reading in the area where the anchors will be installed and at the depth of the anchor helix. If the soil varies in consistency across the site, then use the lowest reading. Based on this reading, consult the anchor manufacturer's charts to select the anchor type(s).

Torque Probe. Before using the torque probe, check with the utility companies for the location of underground cables or pipes to avoid contact with the probe shaft.

What type of support system will this installation use?

- ► **For pier and ground anchor**, go to **Install Footings,** (p. 19)
- ► **For load-bearing perimeter wall**, go to **Construct Foundation,** (p. 33)

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