

something that looks radically different. If the extension is relatively small compared to the rest of the house, then the latter option may be harder to get right. And, if you're in a conservation area (or similar) your choice will be limited – check the rules for development with your council.

Let in light

One potential disadvantage of extending is that the centre of the house gets less daylight and can become quite dingy. Assuming that a first floor is not being added, this problem can be greatly alleviated by fitting rooflights. Sometimes it is possible to introduce side windows in the existing walls, which – even if they look out onto a side alley – will help brighten up the room. In addition, fitting large sliding or bifold doors to the rear of the extension that can be opened up in the summer will make the best use of views over your garden, as well as seamlessly linking your interior and exterior spaces.

Should there be no way of getting enough natural light into the heart of the ground floor, the best use of the central area is for the kitchen, because the use of artificial light during the day is more acceptable in this zone. Specialist lighting, especially for kitchens, has come on in leaps and bounds over the years, and a clever arrangement of ambient and task fittings can be used to create a warm and welcoming space regardless of the quantity of daylight that is available.

If you are keen to let in as much sunshine as possible, extending with a conservatory has an array of benefits – the glazing will not reduce lighting levels to the same extent as a solid roof and walls. Apart from the risk of overheating in the summer, the combination of a fully glazed roof and lots of moisture produced by cooking and washing in a kitchen is a condensation risk, so if you do go down this route, powerful mechanical ventilation will be essential. In addition, Building Regulations have some restrictions on glazed extensions due to their relatively poor levels of insulation, so if they are going to be part of a bigger room you'll need expert help to get them approved.

PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

You can add a surprisingly large ground-floor extension to the back and side of your home without having to make a planning application, provided that it satisfies the rules listed below. The rights apply to the original house as it was first built or as it stood on 1 July 1948 (if it was constructed before that date) – as although you may not have built an extension to the property, a previous owner may have done so. Bear in mind that these rules do not usually apply to listed buildings, conservation areas, national parks and other areas with special planning controls.

- No more than half the area of land around the original house can be covered by extensions or other buildings.
- You must not add any structure forward of the principal elevation, or a side elevation fronting a highway.
- Extensions should not be taller than the highest part of the original roof.
- In England, maximum depth of a single-storey rear addition is 6m for an attached and 8m for a detached house. These limits are halved elsewhere.
- A single-storey rear extension should be no higher than 4m.
- The maximum eaves height of an extension that's within 2m of a boundary should be no more than 3m.
- The eaves and ridge height must be no higher than the existing house.
- Single-storey side extensions should have a maximum height of 4m and width of no more than half that of the original property.
- Materials should be similar in appearance to the existing house.
- No verandas, balconies or raised platforms are allowed.



Above and right: This stylish extension from DesignSpace London has completely transformed this semi-detached home – replacing a garage at the side and adding space to the rear. A narrow skylight introduces a slice of daylight across the full width of the room, visually separating the extension from the rest of the house. Kitchens from DesignSpace London start from £25,000