The Single-Story T
Our Newest and Best Design for the Owner-Builder

In more than 20 years of helping people in over 30 states build their own homes from our kits, FirstDay has focused intensively on our expertise in custom architecture. We’ve made dozens of personal variations on our basic house design. We’ve made saltboxes, capes Canadian-style homes, homes with porches, and homes with additional wings.

With new building codes and a transformed housing market, building a custom-designed FirstDay has been a huge amount of work for our customers. Now, we’ve distilled all we’ve learned from those hundreds of projects and hundreds of customers and used that practical wisdom to create what we believe to be the simplest, most practical, most elegant owner-built home design you can buy: the FirstDay Single-Story Cottage T.

To develop this design, we asked ourselves what we could eliminate to make the house easier to afford and construct.

First, we realized that we could eliminate the full basement, one of the most expensive steps in building your home. Our customers were finding that the cost of building a full basement, properly insulated and drained, could be almost equal to the cost of the kit. If we eliminate that step, we not only dramatically reduce the cost of the house, but also eliminate the need for our customers to build the first-floor deck—saving even more cost, labor, and time.

Instead, we’ve designed the new Single-Story T to be built on a concrete slab that you could possibly lay yourself. You can also easily lay tubing in the slab for a radiant heating system, which is cheaper, more comfortable, and easier to install than a conventional hot water or forced air heating system. This saves up to 75% of the cost of a full basement—money you can use instead to invest in
additional features for your house or save for future additions.

We give you step-by-step instructions for setting forms and laying your slab.

Second, we’ve eliminated the second floor, one of the most difficult parts of building your home. Our classic FirstDay designs include a large, open first floor and bedrooms on the second floor. We know from our own experience that building a second story is one of the most difficult and time-consuming aspects of home construction, in part because it also involves building an interior staircase which can be difficult and time-consuming for non-professional builders. Having bedrooms on a second story can also become a problem as people age.

In the Single-Story T, we put the bedrooms in a separate wing on the main floor that is isolated from the house’s living area. As a result, the elements of the structural framework are smaller and easier to raise into place, and the house is suitable for people of all ages to live in.

Older people often have to give up the homes they’ve lived in for decades because they can no longer safely use stairs. That will never happen in a FirstDay Single-Story T.

The Single-Story T also results in superior acoustic privacy in a compact house design. One reason for a second floor is to separate bedrooms from the living space. But, with simply a wooden deck between the two stories, acoustic privacy can be a challenge. In the Single-Story T, the bedroom wing is separated from the living area by closets, bathrooms, and storage areas as well as simply by distance.

With these changes and other innovations that we’ll show you, we’ve created a house that’s easier and less expensive to build, and is still appropriate for the majority of small families. There are three sizes to choose from, the largest having three bedrooms and two bathrooms. You can add one or more wings when you need more space. If you wish, you can also add more windows at the exterior end of the living space to create a sunroom.

The result is a home that’s airy and full of sunlight, with a kitchen that works, bedrooms that offers privacy, and a living area that brings the family together. Everything we’ve learned about making comfortable, efficient, livable, owner-built homes is embodied in the Single-Story T.
Other Key Features of the Single-Story T-House

The house can be enlarged when you’re ready. After you’ve built the main house, you can add one or two rooms when you’re ready. An additional wing can serve as a master bedroom with a private bath, a studio or office, a workshop, a family room, or whatever you need it to be. By building a Single-Story T, you’ll develop the skills and confidence that ensure that you can add an additional wing later on with relative ease.

Builder Tip: You can cut the cost of adding a master suite by scouting houses that are having their bathrooms remodeled and picking up old sinks, toilets, and tubs for the trouble of hauling them away. You might wind up with blue or bright pink fixtures in your master bath, but the price will be right, and it will add character to your new addition.

The house is among the most energy-efficient you can buy. Proper insulation and building wrap mean that the house isn’t drafty. The insulation wraps the entire house and goes over the structure, so there are no energy-wasting gaps. Most owner-builders take the care to chink and tape all the little cracks and joints where air can leak in and heat can leak out in the winter. We will customize the amount of insulation to meet local codes, and even help with an energy analysis of the home for your permit.

Often, the radiant heating system embedded in the floor meets the house’s heating needs on all but the coldest days and can be run from a standard water heater – no furnace or boiler needed. You can also just use a small woodstove or one or two high efficiency space heaters or heat pumps.

Many customers with woodstoves tell us they often keep a window cracked open in the winter because the house can become too warm.
Three out of five FirstDay owners heat their homes with a small woodstove, which radiates heat and never use the radiant heating system. Some never even connect it.

You can also often cool an entire Single-Story T house by placing an inexpensive, remote-controlled air conditioner in each of the three roof peaks. This provides very even and efficient cooling throughout the home.

The rooms are large. The bedrooms in the standard two-bedroom Single-Story T

are 10 by 15 feet, larger than in many conventional houses now being built. The living area is expansive while creating distinct areas for different activities. In addition, all rooms have cathedral ceilings. Remember that a room’s size is measured by volume and not by floor area. These are big rooms.

Talk to us to find out why cathedral ceilings don’t reduce a home’s heating efficiency.

The rooms are bright and airy and the great room can double as a sunroom and screened porch. Each bedroom can have a window on at least two exterior walls for maximum cross-ventilation. The great room’s exterior wall can be built as a continuous bank of windows, with two more windows above and one or two more on the side walls. In three
seasons, the windows can be opened for ventilation and bring the outdoors inside.

The house offers privacy. One reason for a second floor is to create privacy by separating the bedrooms from the living space. But when the bedrooms are directly over the living space with only a floor between them, it’s too easy to hear every noise. In the Single-Story T, the bedrooms are separated from the living space by closets, bathrooms, and storage areas. This creates physical distance for a sense of privacy and also enhances acoustic privacy. None of the sleeping areas share a wall directly with the kitchen or living space.

The focus of the kitchen is the island. More and more FirstDay owners are doing away with space for a dining table and instead making an extra-large kitchen island in the great room. For many families, the kitchen island has become the new activity center of the home.

The result is a house designed to be practical, reasonable, and special.

The FirstDay T is practical. It’s affordable, but still meets the needs of a family for a gathering area and private spaces for sleeping and for “getting away”. Bedrooms are buffered from the kitchen and living areas. The house is easily and efficiently heated at a low cost. The house can easily be expanded to accommodate new family members (an in-law wing), new needs (a home office), new interests (a sewing room or art studio), or you can bring a private new master bedroom wing to a house full of teen-agers.
The FirstDay T is a reasonable home to build yourself. There’s no full basement or second floor to consume your budget, your labor, your energy, or your time – no staircases to install, no scaffolding to erect, less time spent on ladders. You could possibly lay the slab yourself (we show you how), the pieces of the frame can be built and raised easily (best done using a sign crane), and the house can be completed in a reasonable number of weekends.

The FirstDay T is a special place to live. Its all-wood construction (no sheetrock, plywood, or particleboard in a FirstDay) means not only that the materials are renewable, making the house among the “greenest” you can buy, but that the house will last for decades. Cathedral ceilings in every room and lots of windows expand the sense of space. The living area is designed so that family members can engage in different activities at the same time and still converse. The bank of windows at the outside end of the living space can turn the family area into a sunroom or screened porch in warm weather, then be sealed against cold in winter.

The FirstDay T combines conventional design and architectural flair. The house solves practical problems of circulation, storage, and privacy in a compact house, while also including features that bring light, open space, and create areas that naturally bring people together. The FirstDay does all of these things in a design that won’t offend conventional tastes. We’re proud that, in any town in the U.S., our FirstDay T will say, “We want to be your friend.”

Important Questions

What’s in the kit?
We include everything you need above the slab except plumbing, wiring, heating, and the kitchen countertops. We also don’t include closet doors, which we expect you to make yourself. We also send you a complete set of working drawings and full, step-by-step instructions. Most important, we provide you with continuous support to answer your questions and help you solve problems as you’re building.

A FirstDay Cottage kit getting ready to ship

What will it cost?
Kits for the three basic models of the Single-Story T house cost from $20,000 to $40,000. Subcontractors for foundation, plumbing, heating, and wiring will cost around $20,000 to $30,000. Pay careful attention to the potential costs of infrastructure – water, sewer, and driveway – which can vary greatly. Talk to us about where you’re
building and we can help you determine reasonable costs for your area. Based on the experience of other FirstDay owner-builders, your new home is likely to be assessed at a value $50,000 to $100,000 more than you paid for it. This is the value of your equity as the builder and developer of your home – earned value that isn’t taxed and that you don’t report as income.

Thanks to FirstDay, over the last 20 years there have been many young marriages that have both a high net worth and a low mortgage.

**Builder Tip:** We recommend that you not do your own plumbing, even if your local building code permits you to, and under no circumstances should you do your own electrical work.

**Can I customize my Single-Story T?**
We currently have four standard floor plans for the Single-Story T. However, the FirstDay building system is very flexible so our customers rarely build the house exactly to the floor plan. You don’t need to build headers or footers for the doors and windows, and the end walls and interior walls are not load bearing, so you can move many elements around without compromising the structural integrity of the building frame. As a result, most builders make custom tweaks to a given floor plan as they build.

You can also add some custom elements to the Single-Story T such as a covered porch, bay window, cupola or mudroom addition.

If you want something more custom than that, we still do custom designs and kits, but are limited in the time we have to provide them and there can be a one-year wait (or longer) for custom work. If you’re thinking of a custom project, call us right away to discuss your ideas.

**Do I have time to build my own home?**
Yes. Building your own FirstDay home is a lot of work. But you have a lot of time to do it. Do the math:

In a year: 365 days x 24 hours in a day: = 8,760 hours

You need rest: 365 days x 8 hours of sleep: 
- 2,920 hours = 5,840 hours

Most of us have a job: 50 weeks a year x 40 hours a week: 
- 2,000 hours = 3,840 hours

Most of our builders are couples: 
 x 2 = 7,680 hours

The typical amount of time needed to build a FirstDay T home is about 1,000 hours. If you can dedicate 1/8th of your free time for a year, you can have a new home and earn substantial sweat-equity.

**What if I can’t do everything myself, and need to hire help?**
A FirstDay T can be built by two people that are in good physical health and who have basic carpentry experience. But, once in a while, an owner-builder needs
some help and can’t enlist family or friends. In this case, avoid professionals. They won’t read the instructions and they’ll charge you premium prices so they can pay for their big pickup trucks and other equipment.

If you need extra help go to a vocational school and hire one or two kids in the construction trades program. You’ll be giving them a paycheck and on-the-job experience and you’ll be a mentor to them. You also can go to the nearest VFW post or VA office and hire one or two veterans recently back from combat. Many are looking for work, are used to hard physical labor, and like being outdoors. These people will be cheaper than professionals and will often do a better job because they will follow your lead.

**Can I get financing?**
FirstDay owner-builders can usually find financing from conventional sources. One of the reasons is that we don’t just sell you a house in a kit. We provide you with a business plan to build your own home: a fixed-price kit with complete, detailed instructions, guidance in finding and pricing subcontractors, support and advice from us when you need it as well as from the websites, blogs, and Facebook pages of our owner-builders, and the other details you need to succeed in building your own home.

**OK, let’s do this! When do I have to start?**
We tell our families that if they want to have their site ready and a kit delivered to begin construction in June, they need to start preparations in earnest in January: there are permits to acquire, subcontractors to arrange, temporary electric power to arrange on the site, and literally dozens of tasks and decisions, small and large, that can take months to complete before you can even pick up a hammer. You should allow as much as a week between each task that needs to be accomplished, so pick your construction start-date and then walk back at least 14 or 15 weeks in the calendar. That’s when you need to start the pre-construction phase of your project.

FirstDay Cottage is a very small company with a very small staff and an unusual and very personal way of delivering our product. Give us a call and we can help you kick off your project. Come visit us and we can talk to you about what design will best suit your needs. We can also arrange for you to see a completed FirstDay or connect with recent builders to understand their experience.

Come visit us. There are over 70 FirstDay Cottages within 24 miles of our office. Each point here represents a town with FirstDay Cottages, and many of these towns have multiple houses. To see if there is a FirstDay in your area visit our website at: http://www.firstdaycottage.com/#map
12' Single-Story T Plan

**Square Footage:** 680 sq. ft.

**Rooms:** Two bedrooms, 1 bath, 1 great room for Kitchen / living /dining.

The 12’ Single-Story plan makes for a small but functional 2-bedroom home. This plan is great for a retreat or a starter home for a young couple that can be added onto in the near future. The advantage of building small is that the project will get done quickly and you will earn equity to apply to a future home or addition.
15' Single-Story T Plan

Square Footage: 850 sq. ft.
Rooms: Two bedrooms, 1 bath, 1 great room for kitchen / living /dining.

The 15’ Single-Story plan is another 2 bedroom, 1 bath design, but provides a little more space and flexibility than the 12’ design. It’s still compact, inexpensive, and easy to build, but will give a little more elbow room for a growing family or couple.
18' Single-Story T Plan #1

Square Footage: 1260 sq. ft.
Rooms: Three bedrooms, 2 bath, 1 great room for kitchen / living /dining.

With the 18’ Single-Story plan you can fit 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. This plan is a good size for a bigger family, and you can always add a master bedroom suite in the future for even more space. The 18’ Single-Story is a little bigger, but is still a reasonable house for a couple to build themselves.
18' Single-Story T Plan #2

Square Footage: 1320 sq. ft.
Rooms: Three bedrooms, 2 bath, 1 great room for kitchen / living /dining, 7’ x 30’ porch.

The second 18’ Single-Story plan provides a little more space by extending the main section to 43” 3”, and also adds a 210 square foot porch off of the great room for some nice outdoor space. This plan is pictured with a large kitchen island as a gathering place, and wrap around windows at the end of the great room to create a sunroom type atmosphere. As with the other designs, the 18’ Single-Story is available in a gable or shed roof design. The advantage of the shed roof design is that it is easier to build, provides more room for windows on the tall wall, and makes the integration of the porch easy.
Create Your Own – Custom Single-Story FirstDays

The Single-Story design system is very versatile for creating custom designs. You can create countless variations on the T designs by varying the width or length of each section, or by adding a garage, or custom architectural features to the home such as a bay window or cupola. You can easily turn a ‘T’ into an ‘L’ or include additions to make an ‘H’. Or even add a two-story section if you have the time to build it. If you are interested in a custom design, give us a call and talk to us about your ideas. It’s best to call early because there can be as much as a one-year wait for custom homes.