

Montgomery County roofs live a hard life. We see four honest seasons, plenty of maple and oak debris, humid summers that feed algae, and freeze-thaw cycles that pry at every weak shingle edge. By the time black streaks run down the north slopes or moss starts knitting into the shingle granules, homeowners start making calls. That is when the real risk begins, because roof cleaning is one of those trades where the difference between right and wrong is invisible from the driveway. A thorough job can add years of life. A bad one can void your shingle warranty in a single afternoon.

I have spent years around Midwest roofs, from steep gables near Waveland to low-slope additions in New Market and farm outbuildings between Darlington and Linden. Good cleaning companies tend to have the same habits: careful inspection, realistic scheduling, tight control of chemicals, and paperwork that protects both sides. The flashy outfits that promise “like-new in an hour” with a power washer tend to cut corners, because that is the only way they can keep those promises.

What matters more than anything is the conversation you have before you sign. If you ask the right questions, you will learn quickly whether you are dealing with a specialist or a splash-and-dash operation.

## Why cleaning a Crawfordsville roof is not generic work

The black streaks on most asphalt roofs here are a specific type of blue-green algae called *Gloeocapsa magma*. It thrives on humidity and shade. It eats the limestone filler in shingles, which is why you see heavier staining below vent pipes and valleys where moisture lingers. Moss and lichen also show up, especially along tree lines or on the north and east faces. The fixes are not complicated, but they do require matching method to material.



Asphalt shingles dominate local homes, sometimes with an architectural profile and sometimes three-tab on houses built before the mid-2000s. Metal roofs are common on barns and newer farmhouses. Cedar shakes exist, but they are rare and require specialty care. On the commercial side, EPDM and TPO membranes cap many flat roofs downtown and along 231. Each surface reacts differently to cleaning, and a crew that treats them all the same is not the crew you want.

Weather shapes the calendar. Spring and early summer are ideal for cleaning in our area, once the pollen waves settle. Late summer can work, but high heat speeds chemical evaporation and can spot shingles if a crew rushes. Fall is fine after leaf drop. Midwinter cleaning does happen on warmer days, yet it is slower, riskier, and harder on both workers and equipment.

## What a professional roof cleaning actually looks like

A proper roof cleaning starts with a roof and site inspection. The tech should walk the property, note plantings, downspout locations, and sensitive areas such as fish ponds or vegetable beds. On the roof, they should check for failed flashing, open tabs, thin granule fields, and any wind or hail scars. If the roof is beyond cleaning, an honest company will say so. Most roofs with algae staining are still sound. Heavy moss that lifts shingle edges can be a different story.

Soft washing is the standard for asphalt shingles. “Soft” does not mean soap and hope. It means controlled flow and low pressure, often under 100 psi at the surface, with a chemical mix that does the heavy lifting. Most reputable crews use a sodium hypochlorite solution in the 1 to 3 percent range on the surface, blended with surfactants and water. Think of it as a very strong, carefully applied bleach mix that kills algae and loosens growths. Pressure washing a shingle roof is a

mistake. It strips granules, opens the mat to UV, and shortens the roof's life. A wand can make an old roof look new in an hour. It can also cost you five good years.

Metal roofs tolerate more pressure, yet the safest approach still leans on chemistry and gentle rinsing. Cedar requires specialty cleaners and very low pressure, sometimes followed by a wood preservative. On flat commercial membranes, crews use manufacturer-approved cleaners and soft bristle agitation with careful containment of runoff.

Results vary by growth type. Algae streaks usually fade to near-zero during the visit, then continue to lighten as rain rinses dead cells. Moss and lichen should not be scraped aggressively. The best practice is to kill them and let the roots release over weeks. You will sometimes see pale circles where lichen died. Those spots usually blend in as the roof weathers.

## Methods at a glance

A quick comparison helps anchor the conversation you will have with any contractor who sets foot on your driveway.

| Method | Suitable surfaces | Pros | Risks or downsides | Notes | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Soft wash, low pressure | Asphalt shingles, most metals, tile | Manufacturer-aligned, preserves granules, fast results on algae | Requires chemical handling skill, plant protection needed | Typical on residential roofs in Crawfordsville | | High-pressure washing | Metal panels, concrete tile in select cases | Fast visible change | Strips granules from shingles, can force water under laps and flashings | Avoid on asphalt shingles | | Manual moss removal | Heavily mossed asphalt or cedar | Protects fragile roofs, targeted | Labor intensive, slower visual results | Combine with soft wash to kill spores | | Chemical pretreat and gentle rinse | EPDM/TPO commercial roofs | Low risk to seams, controlled | Must follow manufacturer cleaner list, runoff management needed | Often paired with vacuum recovery in commercial settings |

The best contractors adapt the method to the roof in front of them and explain why.

## Five critical questions to ask before you hire

- What is your specific process for my roof type, and how will you protect it?
- What insurance do you carry, and will you send a certificate of insurance listing me as additional insured for the project dates?
- What chemical mix will you use, at what on-roof concentration, and how will you protect landscaping and manage runoff?
- Who will be on my roof, and what safety measures will they use given my roof's pitch and height?
- What does your price include, what might cost extra, and what warranty do you offer on the cleaning and on plant protection?

Those five questions sound simple. They are not. Listen to what the contractor says and what they do not say. A seasoned cleaner can answer each one plainly, without hedging or jargon. If you get a lot of hand-waving around process or paperwork, keep looking.

## Insurance, licensing, and what really matters in Indiana

Indiana does not maintain a statewide license for roof cleaners. Some cities have contractor registration, but most cleaning work in Montgomery County does not trigger a permit. Do not let the lack of a license lull you into dropping your guard. Insurance is what counts.

Ask for a certificate of insurance that names you as additional insured and lists policy limits. For residential work, a million dollars in general liability is a common baseline. Workers' compensation is the big one, especially if you own a two-story home or anything with a steep pitch. If a worker falls and the company does not carry comp, you do not want to learn how liability can trace back to the homeowner. Commercial auto coverage matters if they drive heavy rigs onto your property.

Reputable companies can have their agent email a certificate directly to you, often same day. If the contractor wants to hand you a photocopy in the driveway, or promises to send it after the job, stop the process until the document arrives.

## **Chemicals, plants, and the Sugar Creek watershed**

Sodium hypochlorite is the workhorse because it kills algae effectively at low pressure. The key is control. I have seen soft wash mixes between 0.8 and 3 percent active on the shingle surface, adjusted for temperature, shade, and staining. Hot days call for wetter surfaces and shorter dwell times, because the mix flashes off faster. Heavier stains may require a second, lighter pass once the first has worked.

Plants matter. Bleach burns tender leaves, especially azaleas, hydrangeas, and hostas that many Crawfordsville yards favor. Good crews follow a rhythm: pre-wet, cover if needed, monitor overspray, and post-rinse. Downspouts can be bagged or diverted to lawn areas to dilute. If there is a koi pond or a vegetable bed, insist on additional protections and slower, more controlled application. A simple garden hose rinse as the crew works can save a landscape. So can a worker stationed on the ground whose only job during application is plant care.

You might hear the word "surfactant." Think of it as soap that helps the mix cling where it needs to work. Reputable products rinse clean and do not leave sticky residues that grab dust.

Environmentally, your roof drains to the same watershed as your street. Sugar Creek and its tributaries benefit when cleaners manage runoff, dilute appropriately, and avoid blasting material into gutters that lead to storm drains. Residential roof jobs rarely require water recovery gear, but prudence and common sense go a long way.

## **Safety practices you should see, not just hear about**

OSHA fall protection rules are not optional, and roofs do not care how many years someone has been climbing them. Tie-offs, anchors, and harnesses are normal on anything beyond a low-slope ranch. Ladder stabilizers protect gutters and improve footing. Shingle-friendly footwear prevents scuffing, especially on warm days when granules are less secure. Crews should pause in gusty wind. They should not rush to beat a storm that is already spitting.

A good foreman will define roof zones. They will keep the chemical line under control, keep the hose away from sharp drip edges, and never drag a stiff hose across warm shingles. They will decide when a slope is too steep or too worn to support foot traffic and will change the approach accordingly, sometimes from a lift or with a longer-throw application.

If your home has solar panels, skylights, or brittle ridge vents, the plan should account for them. Soft wash mix is not kind to anodized aluminum if it sits. Sensitive surfaces should be rinsed promptly.

## Scheduling and seasonal sense

In Crawfordsville, late April through June gives you cooperative temperatures and steady daylight. If trees hang over the house, consider waiting until the bulk of pollen is down to avoid a yellow haze settling on newly cleaned shingles. Late September through early November also works well, often with the bonus of leaf cleanup included if the crew offers gutter clearing.

Morning starts are better than high noon in July. The chemical works longer before it dries. South-facing slopes may wait until afternoon, when they have cooled a touch. If an outfit presses to work through steady rain, ask why. Light mist can extend dwell time, but downpours waste mix and risk streaking, and they make footing unpredictable.

## Pricing that makes sense, and what red flags look like

Most residential shingle roofs in our area fall between 1,600 and 3,000 square feet of roof surface, not to be confused with the home's interior square footage. A straightforward soft wash for algae and light lichen often prices between 300 and 800 dollars in Montgomery County, with larger, steeper, or more complex roofs running higher. Some contractors price by roof square footage at a loose rate such as 20 to 50 cents per square foot, then adjust for pitch, number of stories, access, and severity of growth. Others use tiered packages.

Travel to rural addresses can add a modest fee, especially if the crew is hauling water. Extras often include gutter whitening, heavy moss treatment that requires a return visit, or plant protection that goes beyond the norm, such as covering a koi pond with a temporary frame.

What should worry you is a quote that seems to cover the entire job for a price that barely covers the crew's time. If you are holding a 150 dollar bid that promises same-day results on a steep two-story in Ladoga, something is missing. On the other end, a number well above a thousand dollars for a typical one-story ranch with light algae probably means you are buying a bundle of services you do not need.

Tight, transparent proposals list what will be cleaned, the method, what is excluded, and the conditions of any warranty. Vague proposals hide surprises.

## Warranty fine print and the shingle manufacturer's view

Most major shingle manufacturers do not object to cleaning, but they insist on low pressure and appropriate chemical concentrations. If you use high pressure or harsh chemicals, you can void [Roof Cleaning](#) parts of your warranty. Some algae-resistant shingles carry limited streak warranties, often 10 to 15 years, but even those roofs can stain depending on exposure and local conditions. Manufacturers rarely cover cleaning itself.

Ask two warranty questions. First, does the cleaner stand behind results for a period, typically 12 to 36 months against the return of algae? That type of warranty usually covers a free retreat, not a refund. Second, will the cleaning method keep your manufacturer warranty intact? A pro should be able to point to a technical bulletin or installation manual that describes acceptable cleaning practices. If the proposal includes pressure washing on asphalt shingles, you have your answer.

Aftercare is simple. Keep trees trimmed back where practical, keep gutters clear, and consider zinc or copper strips near ridge lines on problem slopes. Those metals slough ions that inhibit algae. They are not magic, and they are not pretty up close, but they help on shady faces. Avoid routine hose rinsing from the ground. Walking a wet roof is not worth the risk, and gentle rain will do the job.

## How to compare two proposals without getting lost

Put the quotes side by side, but make sure you are comparing the same scope. One outfit might include gutter cleaning, soffit wash, and a plant protection warranty. The other might quote roof only with a carve-out for landscaping damage. One might plan a two-step process with a second visit to treat heavy moss after it releases. The other might plan a single, hot pass. Those differences justify price gaps.

Read the chemical plan. "Proprietary solution" is often code for bleach with a surfactant, which is fine, but the contractor should still share their approach. Read the safety plan for your roof geometry. If you see a blanket "we do not use harnesses," that is not a policy. It is a liability.

Finally, consider responsiveness. If a company returns calls promptly, sends documents without prompting, and shows up when they say they will, they will probably treat your property with the same respect.

## **A brief case from the field**

A homeowner west of Waynetown called about thick moss on a 20-year-old, two-layer shingle roof under heavy oaks. From the ground, it looked like a cleaning would do. On the roof, you could see tabs lifting where moss had crept under laps and expanded. Soft washing alone would have killed the growth, but it would not have re-seated those shingles. The right call was a hybrid. First, a delicate dry removal with plastic scrapers to knock down the worst mats without tearing granules, then a low-concentration soft wash to kill remaining roots, and finally a candid talk about the roof's remaining life. The cleaning improved the look dramatically, but the owner also learned that two valleys would likely leak within a couple of winters and began planning for replacement. That is the difference an honest inspection makes.

## **The hiring path that avoids headaches**

- Gather two to three local quotes from companies that do roof cleaning regularly, not just as a side note to pressure washing.
- Ask for and review insurance certificates sent by their agent, then confirm process details for your roof type.
- Walk the property with the estimator to identify sensitive areas and agree on access, water use, and plant protection.
- Compare written scopes for method, inclusions, exclusions, and warranties, not just the final number.
- Schedule for a weather window that suits the method, then plan to be home for a brief walkthrough before and after.

That short sequence prevents 90 percent of the misunderstandings I see.

## **Local nuances worth noting**

Crawfordsville and surrounding towns have a healthy mix of mature trees. Virginia creeper and ivy on brick faces can creep onto lower roof edges and trap moisture. A cleaning plan should include devil's-in-the-details tasks like trimming back vines that touch the roof or clearing the debris field where the garage roof tucks under a taller wall. If you keep a rain barrel on a downspout, disconnect it before the visit so you are not collecting diluted chemical. If your home is on a well, let the crew know, because they may bring water or plan their chemical mix differently.

Farm properties with metal roofs see different issues. Pollen, dust from field work, and soot from controlled burns can leave films that need surfactant-heavy mixes and steady rinsing. Fast-rust staining around fasteners on older exposed-fastener panels is not a cleaning problem, it is a maintenance problem. A good cleaner will tell you the difference and not charge you to chase stains that are actually corrosion.

Downtown commercial roofs deserve a word, too. If you own a building with a low-slope EPDM membrane, you want a contractor familiar with your manufacturer's cleaning guidance. Some membranes react poorly to certain solvents, and some require rinse water recovery to keep drains free of residue. That is a different animal than a house in Linden, and any bid should reflect that.

## **Red flags you can spot from the driveway**

If the estimator never leaves the truck, proceed carefully. Algae and moss are not uniform, and access matters. If the promised "cleaning" is actually a pressure washer with a turbo nozzle and a ladder, that is a hard no for asphalt shingles. If the company cannot name their chemical in plain terms or argues that garden-strength bleach is not part of the industry standard, you are likely dealing with a marketing script, not a field practice.

Rushed scheduling can also be a sign. A quality outfit is often booked a week or two out during peak season. Same-day or next-day work is not inherently bad, but if it comes with rock-bottom pricing and vague paperwork, it is wise to pause.

## **A homeowner's checklist for after the job**

Walk the property with the foreman. Look for white residue on windows or siding and ask for a rinse if you see it. Check landscaping the next day. Many plants bounce back from minor exposure with a good watering, but a plant protection warranty should cover replacement if damage occurred despite precautions. Watch the roof over the next [roof cleaning](#)

[company Crawfordsville](#) two to four weeks. Dead lichen circles may persist for a while, which is normal. If algae streaks refade quickly, call the company. Most will retreat without a fuss within the warranty window.

If the job included gutter cleaning, confirm that downspouts flow and that debris was bagged rather than rinsed into your beds. If you keep records for your home, file the invoice and the insurance certificate with your maintenance folder. Those documents help if you sell the house or if you later need to talk to a shingle manufacturer.

## **The bottom line**

Roof cleaning is not a luxury in our climate. It is maintenance. Done right, it extends roof life, improves curb appeal, and keeps warranties intact. Done wrong, it looks great for a minute and costs you later. The difference is almost always visible before a hose is uncoiled, in how a contractor answers a few pointed questions and how their plan fits your roof, your yard, and our local conditions.

If you live in Crawfordsville, or in a town within a short drive of it, you have options. Choose the one that treats your roof as part of a system, respects the property around it, and puts method ahead of marketing. Ask the five questions, insist on insurance, and expect clarity. Your roof will thank you the next time a summer storm rolls up the valley and pounds it for half an hour, then leaves as if nothing happened.