

Before you build a treehouse rental

A treehouse rental can be a great business. It can also be an expensive lesson if you do things out of order. This is the order I'd take it in, from the first phone call to the first guest.

Dylan White, founder of Rooted Retreats

01 Make sure you're allowed to rent it

Call your township or county zoning office before you design anything. Ask whether short-term rentals are allowed in your zone, and what permit or registration you need.

Then ask the building department how they'll treat an elevated structure that guests pay to sleep in. Most building codes have no treehouse section, so each town decides for itself. Check your deed and any HOA rules too.

02 Solve the bathroom early

It's usually the slowest approval on the list. Any toilet, even a composting one, typically needs sign-off from the local health or sewage office. In Pennsylvania that's your municipality's Sewage Enforcement Officer.

A septic system sized for your house may not be approved for extra guests. Work out power, water, and a lit path from parking at the same time.

03 Start with the tree

Healthy, mature trees make the build. Have a certified arborist look at them before design starts.

A good build hangs on engineered treehouse attachment bolts: a few strong connections instead of dozens of small ones, set so the tree can keep growing and moving. Nothing should wrap around the trunk. Plan on an inspection every year.

04 Build it for strangers

Guests don't know your land, and a lot of them arrive after dark. Any deck or edge more than **30 inches** off the

ground needs a guard: **36 inches** tall under the residential code, **42** under the commercial code, with no opening a 4-inch ball can pass through. Ask which code applies to you.

Put a smoke alarm in every sleeping area, and a carbon monoxide alarm if anything burns fuel, like a propane heater, gas fireplace, or wood stove. Get engineered drawings that account for snow, wind, and a full house.

05 Set up the business before the first booking

Insurance. Most homeowners policies exclude short-term rental activity. Get a policy written for short-term rentals. Airbnb's AirCover isn't a replacement for your own coverage.

Taxes. Short stays usually carry lodging tax. In Pennsylvania that's the **6%** state hotel occupancy tax on stays under 30 days, plus county tax in many places. Platforms collect some of it, but it's on you to confirm what's covered.

Fees. Airbnb now takes **15.5%** from most US hosts, and it applies to your cleaning fee too. Price for it.

06 Run your own numbers

Revenue is your nightly rate times the nights you actually book. Pull both from 5 to 10 comparable unique stays within about an hour of you, over a full year, not just peak season.

Then list every cost: the platform fee, cleaning, insurance, utilities and Wi-Fi, supplies, repairs, software, and **20 to 30%** of revenue if you hire a full-service manager. Expect a slower first season while reviews build. You can model it at rootedretreatsco.com/calculator.

How a build with Rooted Retreats works Talk it through: dylan@rootedretreatsco.com or rootedretreatsco.com/contact

Site visit	Design	Deposit	Build	Handoff
\$1,000+	2 to 4 weeks	20%	3 to 6 months	Year-1 warranty
Tree and site walk with a written scope. Credited in full to your build if you hire me.	Engineered drawings, scope agreement, and materials list.	Due at signing. Buys materials in your name and locks your spot on the calendar.	Per unit. Billed at milestones: foundation, framing, dry-in, finish.	As-built docs and a maintenance manual for your trees and structure.