

Guest & Side Chairs

These are the 10 most commonly asked questions about guest & side chairs for commercial office environments, with straightforward answers to help you make a confident, well-informed purchase decision.

Top 10 Questions — Guest & Side Chairs

1

How many guest chairs do I need and where do I use them?

Standard quantities by location: reception and lobby areas need 4–8 chairs (or more for high visitor volume), sized for 15–45 minute waits; private offices typically have 2 guest chairs positioned across from the primary desk; waiting rooms in healthcare, legal, and financial settings need chairs sized to client/patient volume; training rooms need the full class count plus 10% extra. Always order 10–15% more guest chairs than the minimum count — guest chairs are used by the widest range of visitors and take varied abuse, making replacement needs inevitable, and having matching replacements on hand avoids mismatched seating over time.

2

What upholstery is most durable for commercial guest chairs?

Contract fabric rated at a minimum of 250,000 double rubs on the Wyzenbeek scale is the baseline for any commercial guest chair — residential upholstery rated at 15,000–30,000 double rubs shows visible wear within a year of commercial traffic. Vinyl or faux leather (rated 200,000+ double rubs) is the best choice for healthcare environments, food-adjacent spaces, and high-traffic areas where wipe-down cleaning with disinfectants is required. Polypropylene shell chairs (molded plastic) offer near-unlimited durability and are appropriate for cafeterias, flex spaces, and modern-aesthetic offices. Genuine leather is appropriate only for executive reception areas with a maintenance program. For high-traffic areas, specify medium-tone fabrics rather than light colors — whites and creams show stains dramatically faster.

3**What is the right seat height for a guest chair?**

Standard guest chair seat height is 17–19 inches — this is the ADA-accessible range and accommodates the widest variety of adult visitors for sitting down and standing up comfortably. Seat heights outside this range create problems: too low (below 17 inches) and mobility-impaired or elderly visitors struggle to rise from the seat; too high (above 19 inches) and shorter visitors cannot sit with feet flat on the floor. Guest chairs have fixed seat heights (unlike task chairs), which means selecting the correct height at purchase is critical and cannot be adjusted later. Always verify the actual seat height measurement, not just the overall chair height, before ordering.

4**Should guest chairs have armrests?**

At least one chair in every waiting and reception area should have armrests. Armrests provide leverage for visitors who need assistance rising from the seat — this is particularly important for elderly visitors, individuals with mobility limitations, and any post-operative or injured visitors. Armless chairs pack tighter and provide a lighter aesthetic, but they offer no assistance for those who need it. Sled-base chairs are harder for mobility-impaired users to exit than four-leg chairs with armrests, so any accessible seating area should include at least one four-leg option with armrests. For ADA compliance, include at least one accessible chair per seating area that meets the 17–19 inch seat height and firm cushion standards.

5**Can I use folding chairs for overflow seating in client-facing areas?**

No — folding chairs look temporary and unprofessional in client-facing environments such as reception areas, executive offices, and conference rooms. Stack chairs provide the same flexibility (they stack 4–12 high and can be brought out for overflow) with a finished, intentional appearance. Nesting chairs provide even more storage efficiency (8–15 chairs in 6 linear feet of wall space) with professional aesthetics. Both stack and nesting chairs are available in upholstered versions that coordinate with existing seating. Folding chairs are appropriate only in back-of-house, warehouse, or event environments where the temporary appearance is acceptable.

6**What weight capacity should commercial guest chairs have?**

Standard commercial guest chairs should be rated for at least 250 lbs under BIFMA ANSI/BIFMA x5.4 testing for lounge and guest seating. For reception and waiting areas serving the general public — where body weights can range from 120 to 350+ lbs — specify chairs rated at 300+ lbs. Frame construction should use welded steel with continuous welds at all joints (not spot welds). Glides and floor protectors should be specified for the floor surface — plastic or felt glides on hard floors, plastic glides on carpet. Metal-tipped legs on hard floors will scratch and damage the surface within weeks. BIFMA certification is the minimum standard for commercial guest seating — non-certified chairs fail faster under the varied-user commercial use pattern.

7**How do I coordinate guest chair appearance with the rest of the room?**

Coordinate the leg and frame metal finish first — match chrome, black, or silver to the dominant metal color in the room (desk legs, table legs, task chair base). This is the most visible coordination element and the most noticeable error when wrong. Upholstery color does not need to match exactly — use a complementary color from the same palette as the room's dominant soft goods. Neutral tones (gray, charcoal, navy) coordinate with the widest range of existing furniture. Match back height scale to the primary seating in the room — a very low-profile guest chair in a room with high-back executive chairs creates a visual imbalance. Always request physical fabric and finish samples and view them in the actual space before committing to a bulk order.

8**What is the difference between a sled base and a four-leg guest chair?**

Sled base chairs use a continuous U-shaped metal frame as the base — this provides a sleek, modern aesthetic and allows chairs to slide easily on carpet without casters. However, sled bases are more difficult for mobility-impaired users to get in and out of because there is no armrest leverage point in the same position as a four-leg chair. Sled bases can also scratch hard floors more easily than glide-equipped four-leg chairs. Four-leg chairs are more stable on hard surfaces, more accessible for mobility-impaired users when armrests are included, and are the better choice for mixed-floor environments. In accessible seating areas, always include at least one four-leg chair with armrests alongside any sled-base chairs.

9**Should I stack or nest guest chairs for storage?**

Stack chairs store vertically — 4–12 chairs per stack on a dolly, with the footprint of one chair. They require lifting each chair and a dolly is essential for moving stacks safely. Nesting chairs store horizontally — rolling under each other in a linked row, with 8–15 chairs fitting in approximately 6 linear feet, no lifting required. Nesting chairs deploy faster and are preferred for spaces with frequent daily setup-and-teardown needs. Stack chairs are more space-efficient per chair in tight storage rooms. For any application requiring stack chairs, order a dolly with the initial purchase — stacking chairs to more than 4–5 high without a dolly is a manual safety hazard and the feature becomes unusable in practice without the dolly.

10**How do I choose guest chairs for a medical or healthcare waiting room?**

Healthcare waiting rooms have specific seating requirements. Upholstery must be vinyl or seamless wipe-clean material — fabric absorbs contaminants, odors, and is difficult to disinfect between patients. Seat height of 17–19 inches is critical for elderly and mobility-impaired patients. At least a portion of chairs must have armrests for patient assistance. The cushion must be firm enough for easy patient egress — very soft cushions are unsuitable. Spacing of at least 36 inches between chairs and between chairs and walls accommodates wheelchair access. Bariatric seating (rated 400–500+ lbs, wider seat) should comprise at least 10% of the waiting area total. All chairs should be BIFMA-certified and rated for at least 300 lbs given the diverse patient population.

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