The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?

You might want to install an outdoor antenna

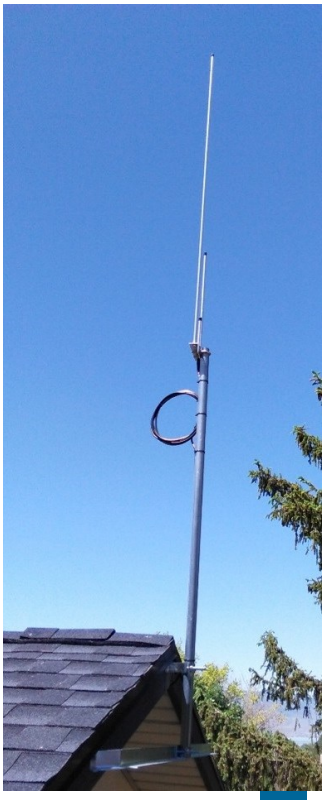
If you're relatively new to ham, you probably use a handheld radio with a stock antenna that we call a *rubber duck*, or a *whip* antenna, such as one by Nagoya, Signal Stuff, or even ABBREE. That antenna might actually have served you well, for the most part, but once in awhile, it seems you just aren't able to hit a repeater that others seem to reach easily. You might also find that you need to either move to that sweet spot in your house, where you get the best signal reports, or go outside.

There's nothing like an antenna that's sticking up over your roof, to get your little signal out as far as your radio can throw it. An outdoor antenna is almost worth its weight in gold, and has the ability to send your voice to distant lands, or at least out of the county. You've no doubt noticed that you can hear others just fine, using your whip antenna indoors, but for them to hear you is often a different story. Having that outdoor antenna can not only improve your radio experience, it can be yet another step in your preparedness lifeline.

Type and care

There are many outdoor antennas to choose from, that you can connect to your handheld radio, and most work very well. If you wonder which you should get, talk to other hams in your club or your neighborhood, to see what they use and recommend. A Pockrus J-pole is probably the best-performing antenna you can get for the price. It doesn't need to be tall or large to serve you well, but in general, the taller the better. You're going to need a length of coax and a pigtail or adapter, to connect your radio to that antenna.

Your outdoor antenna and coax will get wet, and chances are, they're made for rain and snow and ice, so getting wet shouldn't be a problem. The part you don't want to get wet is your connector, between your coax and your antenna. Most connectors aren't waterproof, and need some sort of protection from inclement weather. If you wrap your connector tightly with self-sealing silicone tape, it'll remain free from damaging moisture. Most modern coaxial cable is outfitted with jackets that are protected from damaging ultraviolet radiation, so that's not typically a concern today.



Alternatives

It's true that many people, for whatever reason, aren't able to install an antenna outside their homes. Turns out, however, that there are alternatives, though not ideal, that can still help get your signal out farther than an indoor whip antenna. One approach is to install the Pockrus J-pole in your attic. If worse comes to worse, you can lean your Pockrus J-pole antenna against a window or sliding glass door. Another alternative is to place a stealth Ed Fong antenna on your roof, because it blends in with all the other pipes sticking out up there. Another possibility is to mount a vertical antenna on a flagpole out in your front or side yard.

So, there are ways to make your signal heard father away than what your little rubber duck can do for you. Ideally, it's an outdoor antenna on your roof, but there are alternatives for those who aren't able to put one out in public view.