

NEC Code for Buried Electrical Wires

One-page cheat sheet: Article 300.5 and Table 300.5 | AzadCircuitHub

Minimum cover (inches)

Location	Direct burial UF/USE	Rigid / IMC	PVC	120 V, 20 A GFCI resid.	30 V landscape
All other locations	24 in	6 in	18 in	12 in	6 in
Residential driveways / parking	18 in	18 in	18 in	12 in	18 in
Streets, roads, alleys, commercial lots	24 in	24 in	24 in	24 in	24 in

Measure cover from the top of the cable or conduit to finished grade. Reduced cover is allowed under concrete slabs and in solid rock; read the Table 300.5 footnotes.

Conduit or direct burial?

UF-B and USE-2 cable may be direct buried. Conduit is optional but protects the wiring and allows replacement. Wiring inside buried conduit must be wet-rated (for example THWN-2) because buried raceways are wet locations (300.5(B)).

Can 12/2 Romex be buried in conduit?

No. Type NM cable is not permitted in wet locations. Use 12/2 UF-B, or pull THWN-2 conductors through PVC conduit with an equipment grounding conductor.

Key Article 300.5 points

- Where the line leaves the ground, protect it from 18 in below grade up to 8 ft above grade (300.5(D)).
- Backfill must not damage the cable or raceway; use a sand bed (300.5(F)).
- Fit bushings and seal raceway entries into buildings.
- Add expansion fittings on PVC runs where needed.
- Call 811 before you dig and book the inspection before backfill.

Editions

There is no 2022 NEC. Editions are 2020, 2023 and 2026. California enforces the California Electrical Code (2025 CEC is based on the 2023 NEC). Confirm the adopted edition with your local authority.

Tools and calculators: azadtechhub.com/conduit-fill-calculator/ and azadtechhub.com/blog/electrical-testing/electrical-standards/

Educational summary only. It does not replace NFPA 70, local amendments or a licensed electrician.