

QUESTION: How long must I be a permanent resident before I can become a U. S. citizen?

ANSWER: To naturalize, most applicants must have been a permanent resident for at least five continuous years. You qualify after only three years if you have been married to, and living with, the same U.S. citizen spouse – while a permanent resident for those three years.

Continuous means that you were never out of the U.S. for more than 365 consecutive days. If you go abroad for more than a year (you'll want to get a reentry permit – USCIS travel permission if you plan to do that) you start counting again when you come return. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) credit you one full year for the first day of your return. Then, you can naturalize after four more years of continuous residence (two years for the spouse of a U.S. citizen).

If you abroad on business, to do religious work or to work for the U.S. government, the USCIS will sometimes excuse your absence.

LEGAL NOTICE: Information on this page was provided by **Allan Wernick**, lawyer and Chairman of the City of New York's Citizenship and Immigration Project. He is also the author of "U.S. Immigration and Citizenship – Your Complete Guide, Revised 4th Edition."

The above is provided for information purpose and should not be considered a substitute for legal advice.

07/07/08 – 07/12/08