

Guide to Exterior Home Repairs
80 Great Exterior Home Maintenance Tips and Ideas

By Judith Brown

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1. Roof Repairs

If there's an unfinished attic or crawl space below a leaky roof, finding the leak shouldn't be too hard. Climb into this space and look around with a flashlight-it's easier to see a leak in the semi dark, so don't turn on a light. When you find the leak) outline the wet area with chalk. If possible) push a piece of wire up through the leaky spot) so that it protrudes from the roof. This makes it easier to find the leak when you're working outside.

If possible) repair shingles on a sunny day. A wet roof is dangerously slippery.

You can repair split shingles temporarily even if you don't have any flashing. Put a piece of cardboard in a plastic bag and then slide the bag under the shingles.

You don't have to replace a cracked asbestos shingle if all the pieces are still in place. Pull out the obstructing nails and slide a piece of roofing felt or roll roofing under the shingle until it is behind the cracks. Drill holes for the new nails needed) then drive in the nails gently. Cover the nail heads with roof cement. If black roofing drips tar down on shingles when you're patching) soak a rough rag or brush in kerosene and scrub the stains off right away.

New asphalt shingles can be put down over old asphalt) wood) and roll roofing if it' s only 1 or 2 layers. If it's in 3 layers) the old roofing must be tripped off. Cedar shakes) slate shingles) or tiles, however) must be taken off.

If you want to replace a damaged shake and it doesn't come out easily) split it into several pieces with a hammer and chisel. Remove the pieces and extract the nails.

If the deck under old shingles is spaced sheathing) begin at the ridge so that debris does not fall through the spaces into the house.

To avoid having a new-looking) un-weathered patch in repaired shingles or shakes, take replacements from an inconspicuous area of the house and use new shingles or shakes on that spot.

To make it easier to slide a new shingle up into place, round the back corners slightly with a sharp utility knife. Then lift the corners of the overlapping shingles and drive in a roofing nail at each corner.

Do not store asphalt shingles directly on the ground or on the roof overnight. Stack them on Outside Repairs pieces of 2 x 4. When storing shingles, cover them with tarp rather than plastic, because moisture can condense under plastic. Stack shingles no higher than 4 feet.

For emergency repair of a shingle, cut a patch to fit from a piece of sheet metal and slip it well under the shingle above the one you're repairing. Apply a coat of roof cement to the bottom

of the patch, and tack in place. Cover the tack heads with cement. When you come back to do a more permanent repair later, pry up the patch.

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2. Gutters and Downspouts

For best wear and protection, paint the outsides of gutters with oil-based exterior house paint, and coat the insides with asphalt roofing paint, which will make them resistant to rust.

Never rest a ladder on a gutter. It will bend the gutter out of shape, causing low spots where pools of water will collect when it rains.

When cleaning gutters, inspect each hanger for bent straps and popped nails as you work your way along the gutter. If the house has a fascia or board trim, check the gutter's alignment with it.

The gutter should rest firmly against the fascia for maximum support.

Clean gutters by hand, then hose them down after you've removed the debris. This flushes out the remnants and gives you an opportunity to observe the flow of water and see low spots or improper pitch.

Check the nails or screws in the straps holding the downspout to your house. These can work themselves loose with use or age, or when a downspout has been used as a ladder support.

If you are replacing only a section or two of gutter, take a cross-sectional piece with you when buying a new one. You'll need an exact match of shape and metal.

Using a spray-on auto undercoating is a quick and easy way to repair your rain gutters. If you notice any gaps in the gutter, simply spray. If you have to patch a small hole, put a piece of screen wire over the hole and then spray on the undercoating.

To keep downspouts clear, flush them frequently with a garden hose. If necessary, remove stubborn clogs with a plumber's snake.

When installing a new gutter, get someone to help with lifting the gutter sections. Positioning long sections cannot be done by one person.

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3. Concrete Work

When you're pouring concrete steps, be sure to use solid objects as fillers; hollow objects buried in concrete-pieces of pipe, for example have a tendency to float to the surface.

A smooth concrete surface is a hazard on outdoor steps. After the concrete has settled, but while it is still workable, run a stiff broom across the steps to roughen the surface.

If a hollow glass block in your garage wall breaks, clean the opening and soak some pieces of brick. Put the pieces into the opening and pack the hole solidly with concrete mix. You must use brick or the mix will fall out.

Make drilling in masonry easier by making a pilot hole with a masonry nail at the exact spot where you want to drill.

If you put sand on top of asphalt sealer it will prevent the sealer from sticking to your shoes.

You can prevent wooden forms from sticking to concrete by painting the parts that will be in contact with the cement with oil. An old metal Venetian blind slat can be used as a finishing trowel on small concrete jobs.

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4. Siding Repairs and Maintenance

Cracked, warped, or loose siding should be repaired as soon as you notice it. Water works its way through such defects into the interior wall where rotting can take place undetected. If you don't have time for a thorough repair, seal splits with oil-based caulking compound and clamp.

them together by driving nails and clinching them over the boards. This is an effective short-term expedient.

The best time to caulk is when painting the house. Apply primer to the seams first, then caulk. (Primer helps the caulking stick.) Allow the caulking to cure for a couple of days, then apply a finish coat. Be sure to use a corn pound that will take paint.

If you caulk in very hot weather and the caulking gets runny, place it in the refrigerator for an hour or two.

To remove white powdery surfaces on brick or concrete surfaces, go over them with a stiff brush. Wet the surface with a weak 5 percent solution of muriatic acid and water, leave the solution on for 5 minutes, then brush the wall and rinse immediately with clear water. Work a 4-foot-square section at a time.

When mixing acid and water always add the acid to the water, never vice versa. Put on goggles, gloves, and an apron before mixing, and leave them on until after you rinse off.

To remove mildew from house siding, scrub the surface with a bleach and water solution (1 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of warm water). Flush the area with clear water and allow it to dry thoroughly before painting.

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5. Other Outside Projects

If you plan to install a skylight, position it on the northern slope of your roof. Because a skylight can really heat up a room on a sunny day, make sure the attic is well ventilated.

If you camouflage telephone poles or clothes lines with black paint, they seem to disappear.

When installing an antenna, position it where it cannot fall across a power line.

If water is seeping into your basement, inspect to see if water collects on the ground near the foundation of the house. Soil should slope away from a house, so if the ground is level or slopes in toward the foundation, you may be able to solve your seepage problem by regarding the soil so it slopes properly.

To keep water from collecting where a paved area meets the foundation of your home, undercut the joint, fill it with mortar, and then shape the mortar into a smooth curve with the back of a spoon.

Help prevent ice dams by installing insulation between the rafters in your attic. Use insulation with a vapor barrier and leave air space between the vapor barrier and roof boards under an un-derhang. The insulation should be 6 inches deep.

You can also prevent ice dams by providing ventilation for the attic through the soffit vent between lookout beams, which can be located by nail heads in the soffit.

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6. Chimney Repairs

The chimney in your home should be inspected each year just before the cold season to reduce the chance of fire and to increase efficiency.

You'll see more if you inspect the chimney from the top. On a bright day use a mirror to reflect sunlight down into the chimney. If you can't look down a chimney, inspect it with a strong flashlight and mirror from a fireplace or from the flue opening for a stove pipe.

If the chimney has crumbling mortar, be careful as you chip away cracked, loose mortar in preparation for tuck pointing or remortaring. A chimney in poor condition could topple at any time.

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7. Tools and Ladders

To keep your hands free while you're making repairs, make a holster for the nails and screws you'll need. Take a paper cup and make 2 vertical slits in it about an inch apart; the slits should be wide enough to let you slip your belt through them.

When working on a steeply sloped roof, keep your tools on a sheet of plastic foam. That way they won't slide off.

Need a place to hold your hammer when you're on the roof? Attach a shower curtain ring to your belt and slip the hammer through it.

When using an aluminum ladder, watch out for power lines: aluminum conducts electricity.

If you're planning to work on a ladder extended to its full height, gain stability by lashing the bottom rung to 2 stakes driven into the ground under and to the sides of the ladder.

Before climbing up a ladder test the bottom rung to make sure the ladder is solidly footed.

The best way for a lone worker to raise a ladder is to pin its feet against the base of the house and push the ladder up from the other end, hand over hand, until it is upright. Keep your hips within the ladder's rails.

Extend the top 2 rungs higher than the place where you're working. The ladder should always extend up above the roof.

Make sure your ladder has firm support at the top. Placing it against a window sash or close to an edge means a slight shift could cause you to fall.

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8. Water System

If you're shutting down your house for the winter, turn off the house water supply at the underground street valve.

Here's a fast way to clean the house water pipes of water when shutting down a house. After the water heater has been drained and everything else is empty, there may be water left in low spots

in the horizontal mains. Just stick the end of a running air compressor hose into an opened outdoor hose faucet. The air pressure will shoot the water out wherever there is an opening. When only air comes out, you're done. This beats crawling under the house to drain the pipes.

When shutting down your water system, open all the faucets and outdoor hose spigots to drain. Flush the toilet and sponge out remaining water from tank. Drain or blow water out of fixture

traps, including the toilet. After removing all the tap water from the sink and lavatory traps, fill the traps with a mixture of a little kerosene and a lot of denatured alcohol. Kerosene will keep the alcohol from evaporating.

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