

Siding

Your home is protected from the sun, wind, and rain by an exterior skin of wooden, masonry or manufactured siding. This siding should last the life of your home if properly maintained. However, even the most durable sidings can fail if the home owner does not follow through with a regular maintenance program. This section discusses siding materials and how you can maintain those materials.

Wood Siding

Wood siding is found on many homes. Wood shingles, shakes, boards and panels come in a variety of shapes, styles, sizes, patterns and species. Yet, the various wood sidings are more alike than they are different. Wood siding is susceptible to water and insect damage. The first line of defense is paint or stain. The second line of defense is regular inspection and maintenance and periodic cleaning as discussed below.

Normal wood siding requires painting every 2 to 5 years. The wood siding should last as long as your home if properly maintained. Inspect and clean your wood siding regularly.

During the wood siding inspection, you should check for the following:

Paint. Protect your wood siding by inspecting for paint problems twice a year and repainting every five years, or as necessary.

Peeling or blistering paint is usually caused by warm, moist vapor from the house flowing through the walls, reaching the cold sheathing and condensing. Just a few drops of water between the siding and the film of paint will cause paint to blister and peel. It may be necessary to install vents in the siding to remedy the moisture problem. The defective areas should be properly prepared and repainted.

If you observe other paint problems, such as worn, flaking, wrinkling, or “alligatoring” paint, properly prepare and repaint the defective area.

Ground Clearance. Untreated wood must not be in contact with the ground. Moisture from the soil can cause decay and insects can gain entry to your siding. Examine along the base of your home to make sure you have at least six to eight inches of clearance between the ground and any wood siding or wood trim. If necessary, re-grade your soil away from any wood.

Stain. Stain also protects wood siding from moisture and insects. However, as the stain fades, so does its weather and insect protection properties. Re-stain your siding every five to seven years, or as necessary, to restore color and preserve your siding.

Dry Rot and Termite Damage. Dry rot is a fungus that causes wood to crumble. Termites destroy wood by chewing out its interior. Probe the edges of the wood siding with a knife or thin screw driver and look for



soft, spongy spots. Pay particular attention to any part of the siding that was close to the ground or in contact with the ground.

In addition, check for visible evidence of termites. Look for their translucent one-half-inch-long wings or the mud tubes they sometimes build. If you find evidence of dry rot or termites, consult a licensed termite inspector or pest control professional.

If you spot dry rot and termite problems early, you can often prevent serious damage.

Holes and Split, Warped or Loose Siding. Simple surface problems such as holes in the wood, split or cracked boards, warped or buckled boards and loose siding should be repaired as soon as they appear. Water will work its way through these defects into the interior wall where rotting can take place undetected. Severely damaged board siding must be replaced. Determine the cause of any serious damage before replacing siding. If moisture is causing the problem, find the source by checking for deteriorating roofing, leaking gutters or downspouts and poor drainage. Consult a professional contractor.

Stucco Siding

Stucco is a masonry siding made from sand, cement and water. It is applied over wire lath fastened to wood sheathing. Color is added to the final coat or the stucco is painted after it dries. Stucco is a durable, relatively maintenance-free siding. Elastomeric paint can be applied over the stucco to make it even more durable and easier to maintain. Elastomeric paint is a rubberized paint that protects and preserves the stucco.

You should inspect your stucco siding at least once and preferably twice a year. Early spring is a good time for the first inspection. You will be able to spot any winter damage. In addition, shrubs around your home will not yet have leafed, enabling you to easily view your siding. During this inspection, look for hairline cracks in the stucco, vertical cracks running from the roof line or door or window openings, and bulges or holes in the stucco. Defects in the stucco can be repaired yourself or by a qualified plaster contractor by repainting with elastomeric paint.

Brick, Block & Stone

Brick, concrete block and stone are used as sidings on veneer walls and are also built into masonry walls. Veneer walls are standard wood frame walls with a brick, block or stone facing for weather protection. The wood frame provides the structural support. Masonry walls, on the other hand, use the brick, block or stone as both the structural support and the weather protection.

Inspect your masonry chimney and any brick, block or stone walls twice each year. Look for chipped, cracked, loose, deteriorating and missing material. Any such problems should be repaired to keep water out of masonry material and from causing future damage.

You should also check the mortar joints for weak or crumbling mortar. Use an old screwdriver to test the mortar by scratching along the mortar joints. The mortar should be firm. If it crumbles easily, is cracked or has fallen out, have the mortar joints repaired or water will enter the joints and cause additional damage.

A white powdery substance that can form on the surface of masonry work is known as efflorescence. It is caused by moisture bringing salts to the surface. [Efflorescence](#) is common in new masonry work and can be washed off. If the condition persists, it may be a sign that water is penetrating the wall through cracks, faulty mortar joints or defective caulking or flashing around wall joints or openings. Have the problem investigated and repaired.

If you ever notice bulging sections or large [cracks](#) in either a veneer or masonry wall, have the condition checked by a professional contractor. It may indicate structural problems.

Aluminum, Steel & Vinyl Siding

These are the manufactured sidings. They are generally made to resemble beveled horizontal wood board siding although other styles are available. Aluminum and steel siding usually have baked enamel paint finishes. The coloring in vinyl siding is imbedded in the material. The siding can be smooth or can be embossed with a wood-grain texture to resemble painted wood boards.

These manufactured sidings are insect and water resistant. However, some maintenance is still required.

Aluminum and steel siding can show scratches and can dent if struck by a baseball or other object. Touch up scratches with paint. If dents are obvious, there are ways to remove them. Over time the color may fade and need to be repainted. In many areas, local building codes require that aluminum and steel siding be grounded at each corner of the building.

Vinyl will not dent like aluminum. If hit, it flexes to absorb the shock and returns to its original shape. However, vinyl siding can crack. You should replace any cracked sections.

You should inspect all manufactured siding for loose or damaged sections and open seams and joints. Repair or replace the siding when necessary.

Cleaning

Cleaning your home's exterior surfaces regularly will improve your home's appearance and will help preserve your paint, stain or siding finish. Cleaning once or twice a year will remove light soil as well as grime and pollutants that can damage your siding.

Wash from the bottom up with a solution of soap and warm water. Washing from the bottom up prevents streaking. Pay particular attention to the areas around door handles and window catches where dirt and grease will be heaviest. Rinse with fresh water from top to bottom to prevent runs of dirty liquid on a newly cleaned surface. You can use a pressure washer or a garden hose and scrub brush for this job.

If you find mildew on your siding, apply household bleach directly to any affected areas and rinse with a garden hose.