HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

INSTALLING A "REPLACEMENT DOOR"

A "replacement door" is about the easiest kind of exterior door to install. This term refers to a door that is made just slightly smaller than the one it is replacing; you purchase the door and its surrounding framing as a unit, and then simply slip the unit into the opening from the old door and secure it in place. This system provides an allowance for out-of-square or out-of-plumb houses, and you won't need to take much of your house apart to install the new door.

CHOOSING A MATERIAL

Replacement doors made of steel or fiberglass are most readily available. There was some resistance at first to changing from traditional wood doors to these newer materials, but many homeowners who tried them liked the extra security and insulation they provide. In addition, these doors are nearly indestructible, and don't "stick" like wood doors so commonly do during periods of high humidity. Steel replacement doors have another advantage – many come with a magnetic seal that provides the very best weatherstripping available for any door.

If you prefer a more traditional material, wood replacement doors can be specially ordered. This will increase the cost, but installation will be much easier and less expensive.

ORDERING YOUR DOOR

Before ordering your door, you'll need to measure the existing door and determine its "handing."

DETERMINING THE HANDING

Stand outside the door and face it. If the hinges are on the right, the door is right-handed; if the hinges are on the left, the door is left-handed.

Then, go to your building supply store and order a door that meets your size and handing requirements. (Make sure you get a "replacement door" – installing doors that don't come as a unit with their framing is more difficult.) Most replacement doors come with everything needed to install them – except for the locks, which you buy separately. You'll usually use a deadbolt and a knob lock, often packaged together by the manufacturer.

INSTALLING THE DOOR

1. When you're ready to install your new door, remove the old door and all the hinges and lock plates. Then, carefully pry off the interior trim. (You will re-use it later.)
2. Unpack the new door and see how it fits into the opening. If your threshold has been built up, you may need to chisel off some of it in order for the door to fit. If there is too much play on either side of the doorframe, fill the space with the shim strips included with the door.
3. Once the door and frame fit the opening, take the unit out. Apply caulk to the back edge of the frame and replace it into the opening.

4. Use a level to make sure the door is level and plumb. Then, tack it in place by driving some nails through the holes in the front face of the frame, and check again for level and plumb.
5. You can now unscrew the brackets holding the door to the frame. Open the door, and you'll see the holes for the 3″ screws on the sides of the frame. Drive the screws through the holes into the sides of the frame, being careful not to overtighten.
6. With the door securely in place, install the locks according to the package directions.

WEATHERSTRIPPING

If you will be installing magnetic weatherstripping, first go outside and lock the door. Then, cut the top piece of weatherstripping to length, apply caulk to the back, and lightly nail it in place so that the magnet just catches the door. Don't drive the nails in all the way, in case you need to adjust the strip later. Install the two sidepieces in the same manner, making sure that the sidepiece with the magnet is installed on the side of the door with the lock. After you have tried the door a few times to make sure it works easily, drive the nails in all the way to secure the strips. Other types of weatherstripping are installed in a similar manner; just refer to the package directions.

FINISHING UP

The next step is to adjust the threshold strip. The threshold has three screws that control its height. Adjust them so that the door bottom seals, but the door opens easily. Finally, replace the inside trim – and then sit back and enjoy many years with a draft-free, easy-to-open door.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

WWW.HRRC-CH.ORG
+1.216.381.6100
2520 Noble Road, Cleveland Heights, OH 44121
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