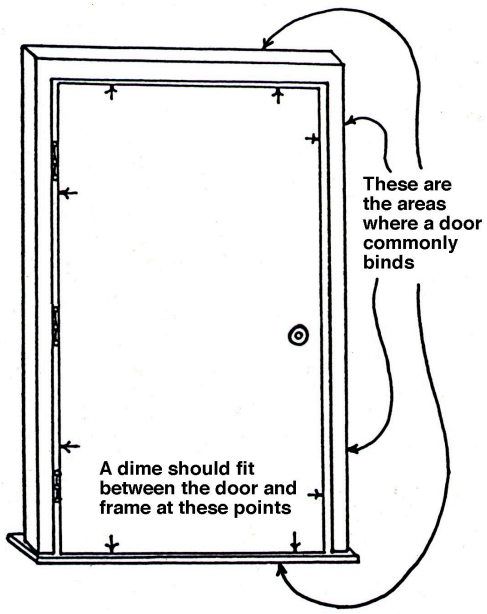
HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

STICKING DOORS

Wooden doors can be a real puzzle. Sometimes they open and close easily, and other times they can be really stubborn. Before you can do something about them, you need to understand why the doors are binding. There are several reasons this can happen.

WHEN THE FRAME SAGS

To start with, as your house ages, door frames that were once straight-and-square can begin to sag (much like everything else). When the door frame is no longer straight and evenly spaced around the door, parts of it will tend to catch on the door. Usually, by looking at the door, you'll be able to see these areas.



Where doors commonly bind, and where a dime should fit

There are different ways to approach this problem.

1. One is to remove both door and frame and reinstall them, making sure that the frame is put in place straight, level, and plumb – regardless of the condition of the wall around it. This process will usually take a few hours of work to accomplish.
2. A second and more practical approach is to shave the door down at the spot(s) where it is hitting the door frame. You can use a belt sander, a plane, or even hand-sand these areas until the door fits again.
3. A third method that will work in a few cases is to remove the top or bottom hinge (depending on where the door is binding), and place some small shims, such as pieces of cardboard, behind it to make the door fit more evenly. If the door binds at the top, place the shims behind the bottom hinge (or vice versa), and then reinstall the hinge.

TOO MUCH MOISTURE

However, the most probable cause for doors not fitting properly is not the settling of your house, but rather the much more inconspicuous problem of too much moisture. Moisture, in the form of water vapor, exists in every home. It enters the door through any area that isn't sealed – usually the bottom. (This is the least painted and cared-for part on most doors.) Moisture that is absorbed into the door causes the wood to swell up, until the door sticks and refuses to cooperate.

In the summer, there is a lot of moisture in the air. But, in winter, with our modern central heating, we often need to add moisture to our homes to make them livable, usually with a humidifier. Even with a humidifier, though, there is seldom enough moisture in the winter to cause doors to swell, so the wood "shrinks" to its normal size. When that happens, you can make any needed door adjustments and seal the bottoms of your doors with some paint or varnish.

THE DIME TEST

When a door is properly installed, you should be able to fit a dime around all four sides of the door. If you use the winter months for some preventative maintenance – getting each door to fit correctly – they'll swing freely next summer.

Home Repair Resource center

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

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