Home Repair Resource center

HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

WHAT TYPE OF DRYWALL

Will best fit your situation?

Whether you're using it in new construction or to repair existing plaster and lath, drywall is the wall material most commonly used by today's homeowner. Drywall is made from gypsum, with a paper coating on both sides. Since there are various sizes, thicknesses, and types available, you'll need to think about how the material will be used in order to select the option that will work best for your project.

MATCH THE DRYWALL TO THE MOISTURE

For a new wall, the most important consideration is how much water the drywall will be exposed to.

LOCATION	RECOMMENDED MATERIAL
Dry areas (new bedroom closet, finished attic)	In a dry area you can use the standard 1/2" drywall that is usually the least expensive.
Shower area	Where direct contact with water can occur if your grout develops hairline cracks or your caulk doesn't make a complete seal, use **cement-impregnated drywall** – like Durock or Wonderboard or Hardiebacker board – as the substrate for your ceramic tile or tub surround.
Other parts of the bathroom, or other humid areas	Use a **water-resistant drywall** (usually called "greenboard" because of its color). One side of this drywall has a treated paper surface that resists moisture. Cover this surface with a mildew-resistant primer and paint, and you'll decrease the likelihood of mold growth and mildew odor.

TUB ON AN OUTSIDE WALL?

Cement backerboard is not damaged by moisture; but, if your tub is on an outside wall, the material does allow moisture to pass through it and condense on the sheathing under the exterior siding, so you'll want to attach a layer of plastic sheeting over the insulation between the studs and the backerboard to prevent peeling paint or damaged siding.

BASEMENTS

It's usually not a good idea to install drywall on the exterior walls of a basement, because it will prevent you from seeing signs of water intrusion – usually caused by clogged sewer lines, sagging gutters, or other problems that are easily remedied – that can cause expensive damage if the problem goes undetected. If you nevertheless want to finish your basement, you can use regular drywall; however, on exterior walls you should first apply a layer of plastic sheeting as a moisture barrier, and then install pieces of 1"-thick Styrofoam board behind the studs and drywall as an insulating material. This combination will decrease condensation on the cold walls on warm and humid summer days *(see handout on "Basement Remodeling").*

SIZES AND THICKNESSES

Finally, even if you're using "regular" drywall, you may need to seek a size or thickness other than the standard 4' by 8', 1/2"-thick sheets. For example, you may find drywalling a large area is easier, with less taping required, if you use 4' x 16' drywall – *provided that* you can handle the extra weight during installation and have the means to transport the larger sheets. If you're using drywall to repair part of your plaster and lath wall, you may need to use 1/4" or 3/8" drywall to have the surface of the patch at the level of the surrounding plaster. Some of these "alternate" forms of drywall are more expensive than the standard, but are usually worth the extra cost in situations like these. If the alternate size you need cannot be found at your neighborhood hardware, seek out a larger building supply store.

> Even if you are doing a simple repair, taking the time to select the most appropriate type of drywall for your project can save you a lot of time now – and headaches later.

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

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