HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

REPAIRING WOODEN TRIM PIECES

Preparation for exterior painting

When you're preparing exterior surfaces for painting, you may find that you need to repair some rotted wood. For example, one of your windowsills may have rotted through. If you spot the problem early, you may be able to avoid replacing the whole sill. By using a wood hardener to restore firmness to the rotted surface and then filling in with wood putty, you can have a paintable surface quickly. Some companies make a series of products intended to work together (for example, Minwax™ Wood Hardener and its companion wood putty) that will create a better bond than unrelated products. Once the putty has cured, you can sand or file it to duplicate the profile of the existing wood.

REPAIR OR REPLACE?

When can you repair a piece of wood trim, rather than replace it? For thinner pieces, you can use wood hardener and putty on small areas, so long as the entire piece retains its integrity. On thicker pieces, like a windowsill, there's an old carpenter's trick that can help you assess the extent of the damage.

PUSH A NAIL OR SCREWDRIVER INTO THE WOOD BY HAND	RESULT
No more than 1/4”	The surface can be repaired.
More than 1/4”	The trim piece is too rotted to be repaired, and should be replaced.

PRIMING AND PAINTING

After you clean up the sanding dust from the surface, use an oil-based primer to seal the repaired area. (You'll get the best results if the wood has been dry for several days, and if the humidity is low on the day you paint.) After the primer has dried (read the directions on the can), use latex or oil-based paint for the finish coat.

CLEAN, DRY, DULL, AND SMOOTH

Bob Moore, who used to demonstrate paint products for a major hardware wholesaler, said that – so long as the surface is “clean, dry, dull, and smooth” – you can get paint to stick to nearly anything.

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

© 2026, Home Repair Resource Center