HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

REPLACING YOUR GUTTERS

Gutters, downspouts, fascia and gutter guards

Installing new gutters is a common home repair. Most people choose replacement gutters made from aluminum, because they don't rust like the older-style galvanized gutters. White and brown are the standard colors available, although you can paint gutters to match your house trim, if you wish.

SEAMLESS OR SECTIONAL?

Homeowners generally consider two alternatives for new gutters. The first is "seamless" gutters, formed by a machine at your house. Seamless gutters are usually installed professionally. The second option is the more traditional pre-made gutter sections that you buy at a retail store and assemble to fit your house. These sections can be installed professionally or on a do-it-yourself basis. Both types of gutters have advantages and drawbacks.

GUTTER TYPE	ADVANTAGES AND DRAWBACKS
Seamless	Seamless gutters have fewer joints to develop leaks. On the other hand, the aluminum from which they are made must be a light enough weight to go through the forming machine. Most contractors use .027 gauge aluminum, which can deform if you lean a ladder against it or if you have some heavy icicles hanging from it. You can specify a heavier .032 gauge, but not all contractors have the equipment to produce seamless gutters of that weight, so you may have to pay a higher cost for them to obtain the materials elsewhere.
Sectional (pre-made)	If there is a drawback to sectional gutters, it's that the joints may leak if the connections aren't made properly. Like seamless gutters, pre-made gutter sections can be purchased in different gauges. The gutter sections available in most retail stores are only .024 gauge (thinner than most seamless gutters), and are sold in standard ten-foot lengths. Heavier-gauge gutters, as well as longer lengths, are available in specialty shops.

It's a good idea to use the heaviest gauge you can, one that will withstand some ice or ladders. In choosing between seamless and sectional gutters, consider cost, durability, and the expertise of the installer. Then, select the option that makes the most sense for your situation.

DOWNSPOUTS

Consider your downspouts, too. In most cases, a traditional 2 x 3-inch rectangular downspout will be sufficient to carry water from your gutter to the storm sewers. However, if one of the downspouts must transport a large amount of water – where several roof sections come together, for example – you may wish to install a 3 x 4-inch downspout. This larger-capacity downspout may not be available at retail stores, but is worth seeking out.

FASCIA BOARDS AND RAFTER ENDS

In addition to the type of gutter you'll be installing, you should also think about the condition of the fascia board that runs behind the gutter. This board can sometimes rot out. If any of your fascia boards have deteriorated, you'll need to replace them when you replace the gutter; otherwise, there will be nothing to nail the gutters into. Outdoor treated wood, pre-painted wood, or vinyl- or aluminum-wrapped fascia will all resist moisture. Any untreated wood used for the new fascia should be painted *both front and back* with two coats of oil-base paint before installation. Rafter ends, to which the gutters are fastened, can also rot out. If that has happened, new pieces of wood will need to be "sistered" alongside the original rafter, so that a gutter hanger or fastener can be secured into sound wood at each and every rafter end. This ensures that the gutter will remain in place even when filled with ice or water. *(See separate handout on "Fascia Board Repair" for how-to information.)*

GUTTER GUARDS

Another "gutter issue" is how to keep your gutters clear of leaves, maple "helicopters," and other debris. Don't try covering your gutters with wire mesh (which will corrode) or flimsy plastic mesh (which will end up dropping into the gutter). If you are going to install gutter guards, it's better to use something made for that purpose. There are many types of gutter coverings, all promising to end clogged gutters forever. They are generally made of aluminum or plastic; neither material will rust, but aluminum can corrode. Corrugated types, usually made of metal, can hold leaves on top of the guard, while plastic models tend to shed better.

Almost all gutter guards will keep leaves out of your gutters, but other types of debris can cause problems. For example, small granules from asphalt shingles are commonly washed into gutters when it rains, and certain styles of coverings can allow smaller bits of organic matter through the openings. Even with gutter guards, you'll still need to check and clean your gutters – just not so frequently – and that can be difficult. Some styles of gutter coverings are screwed in place or otherwise permanently attached, making it nearly impossible to use a hose to wash out the gutter channel without removing the covers. On the other hand, guards that snap into place can be "unsnapped" when you need to do routine maintenance.

CHECK THE STYLE OF GUTTER GUARD

So, when you're considering covering your gutter, don't just consider the price – check out the style of gutter guard being proposed. Whether you are doing the work yourself or contracting the installation, ask what the covering will be made of, how it will be attached, and how you can get access to the gutter channel when necessary.

DOWNSPOUT CLEAN OUTS

A final consideration is whether to add a clean out at the bottom of each downspout, where it enters the tile crock and connects to your storm sewer. Because tree roots frequently invade the storm sewer system, most people will need to snake their downspout drains periodically, and a clean out can provide easy access for the snake cable. **It's a good idea to add clean outs when you replace your downspouts.** *(See separate handout on "Adding a Clean Out" for how-to information.)*

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

© 2026, Home Repair Resource Center