HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

Replacing windows with "replacement windows"

If you've been thinking about replacing your windows yourself, there are some things you should consider to make the job easier. In most cases, homeowners are looking to remove an old, drafty double-hung window and install a new, more energy-efficient window into the same opening.

A double-hung window consists of two "sashes" (window glass surrounded by the frame piece), one atop the other. The sashes ride in separate sash channels, so that they can be raised or lowered, the top sash behind the bottom sash *(see illustration of a typical "original window")*.

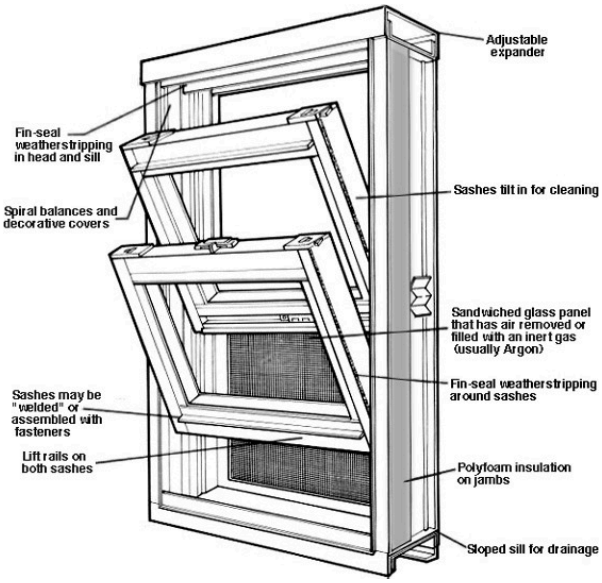
Whether the new window you select is wood, vinyl, vinyl-clad wood, or some other material, it will be one of two types: a replacement window or a new construction window.

REPLACEMENT WINDOWS

"Replacement windows" *(see illustration)* are designed to go into the same opening from which you removed your old window. The advantage is that the entire unit – sashes and frame – will slip into the existing opening without the need to remove the original *jambs* (frame pieces) or trim moldings.

The main disadvantage of a replacement window is that there will be slightly less glass area than in the window being replaced, lessening the amount of natural light. Most people, however, will find that ease of installation far outweighs the small decrease in glass area.

With a replacement window, you'll be inserting the new window and its frame into the old window opening. If the original sill is still in good shape, it will be a fairly easy process. (If the sill is rotted or broken away, it should be repaired before installing the new window.)



Typical replacement window

MEASURING FOR A REPLACEMENT WINDOW

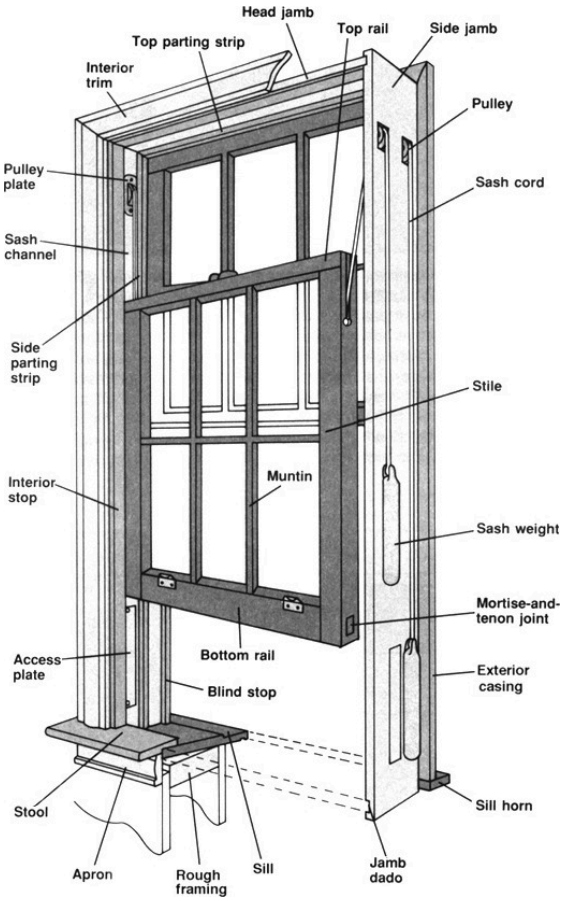
Although you'll find that several common window sizes are readily available, you'll need to "special order" replacement windows of other sizes. For special order windows, it is critical that you measure accurately.

> **MEASURE CAREFULLY**
>
> *If a window that you order is made incorrectly due to your measurement, you may be stuck with it.*

Horizontal dimension	Measure across the space that the lower sash sits in – from one side to the other, sash channel to sash channel.
Vertical dimension	Locate the *stool* (the "inside sill" – the window ledge on the inside of the house); measure from the point where the stool meets the sill, up to the top of the channel.

If possible, have someone re-measure these same dimensions, to make sure your numbers are correct. (Some of the "high-end" distributors will even send out a representative to do the measuring, because they want to have a satisfied customer.)

INSTALLING A REPLACEMENT WINDOW



Typical original window being replaced

Installing your replacement window will involve removing the strips of molding that the sash slides against (called *interior stops*) and the side *parting strips* that separate the sashes. The sashes, cords, weights and pulleys are then removed.

1. Pack fiberglass insulation loosely into the cavity that the sash weight used to travel in, to minimize air movement.
2. Apply a bead of good-quality caulk to the blind stop before slipping the new window into place.
3. If you need to square up the window, use shims on the top, bottom, and/or sides before running the screws into place.
4. Fill any voids between the old jamb and the new window with thin pieces of fiberglass batting or low expansion foam.
5. Finally, re-install the interior stops with a bead of caulk to finish the assembly.

NEW CONSTRUCTION WINDOWS

"New construction windows," on the other hand, are installed into the rough-framed openings *before* the casing (trim molding) is added.

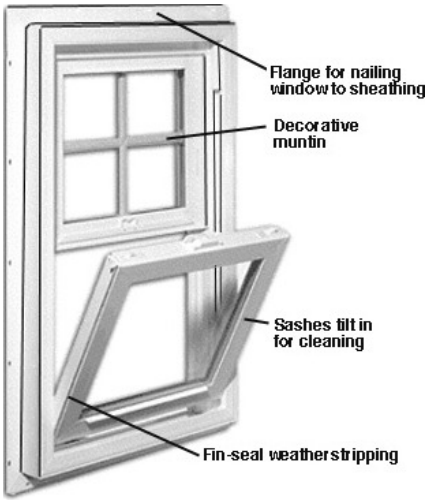
EXPECT TO REMOVE THE TRIM

If you choose to replace your old window with a new construction window, you'll need to remove all the interior and exterior molding from around the old window, and expose the rough framing.

New construction windows have flanges *(see illustration)* that are screwed or nailed through the wood sheathing (hidden beneath the outside trim) to the studs that surround the window opening. To determine the correct size of

the window you need, you'll probably have to remove the interior trim and measure the dimensions of the rough opening.

When you are installing a new construction window in an old house, the walls may be thicker than in newer framing; in such cases, you may need to use extension jambs (pieces of wood that fill the gap). Any voids between the window jambs and the studs should be filled in with foam or fiberglass batting. Reinstall the trim after you have the new window mounted.



Typical new construction window

DON'T GO CHEAP

No matter what type of window you choose, **don't go cheap.** Be sure to buy a better grade unit from a reputable dealer. You'll want a sturdily constructed window, one that will withstand the abuse of daily usage. Make sure that you'll be able to get replacement parts 10 or 15 years from now, when Junior's foul ball meets up with your window. Use caulk rated for at least 35 years, and better quality paint for finish work on the trim. That way, you can enjoy looking out your new windows, instead of repairing them in the near future.

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