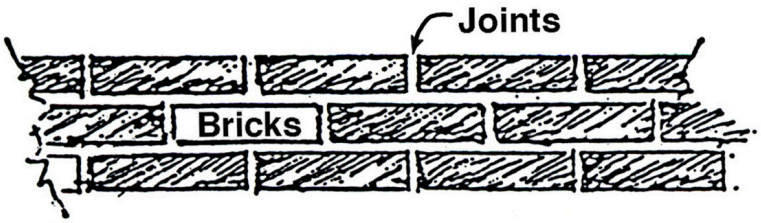
HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

ALL ABOUT TUCKPOINTING

Just about every violations list for an older home includes the need for **tuckpointing**. Yet, few people who are told to do this repair seem to know just what tuckpointing is, much less how to do it. Well, tuckpointing is just a fancy word for replacing the **mortar** that has fallen out from around your bricks – usually in the foundation, chimney, or porch steps.

> **TIMING**
>
> It's important to get this repair finished before winter, when ice conspires to tear your bricks further apart.

WHAT IS MORTAR?



Mortar fills the joints between bricks

Mortar, the main ingredient in tuckpointing, is the cement-type product that is used between bricks to hold them together and keep the weather out. Over the years, it becomes soft or “rotten.” It then starts to fall out, a little at a time.

PREPARE THE JOINTS

1. The first step is to determine which areas need repair. Walk around your house and look for places where the mortar is missing, powdering, or not level with the rest of the mortar between the bricks. These are the areas that need work.
2. Next, take an old screwdriver or smaller chisel and scrape out the loose mortar. If the remaining mortar still seems to be crumbling, you can stabilize it by applying a solution of one part **concrete bonding additive** to one part warm water. Brush it on with a “cheapie” paintbrush the night before you start the work.
3. Before you begin tuckpointing, thoroughly soak the areas you are going to be repairing with a hose. (If you don't get the bricks really wet, the water in the new mortar you put in will be sucked into the surrounding brickwork, leaving the mortar without adequate moisture to set properly.)

MIX THE MORTAR

A pre-mixed mortar mix is usually the easiest product to work with; just mix it according to the package directions. The mortar is grey, but can be dyed to match your existing mortar using **paint tints,** available at most hardware stores. You can mix it in any kind of container – a wheelbarrow, a pail, an old dishpan. (Just wash it out thoroughly when you're done to remove the leftover mortar.) Add water to the dry mortar and mix with a mason's trowel, hoe or shovel to an oatmeal-like consistency: creamy, but not drippy. Don't mix a lot at one time, especially when you're first learning to tuckpoint.

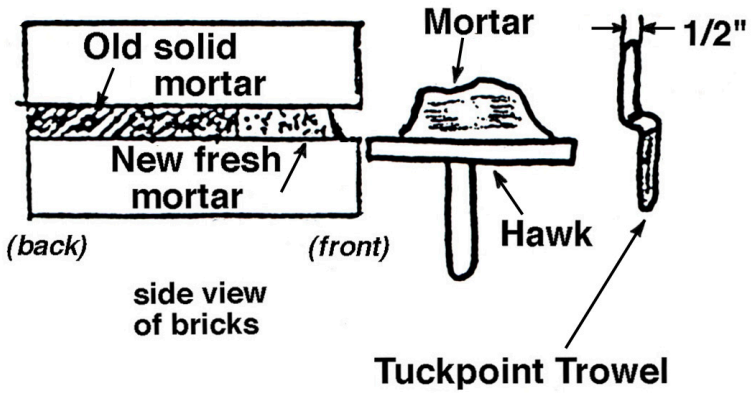
> **WHEN THE MORTAR STARTS GETTING TOO STIFF TO USE, THROW IT OUT**
> Don't add water to it to try making it thinner again – you'll create an improper mix, and the mortar will lose some of its strength.

TOOLS

The main tools you'll be using are a hawk and a tuckpointing trowel.

TOOL	WHAT IT DOES
Hawk	A flat board, about 12" square, with a handle attached to the bottom. It's used to carry some of the mortar right to the spot to be tuckpointed. (You can easily make your own hawk out of some spare wood pieces.)
Bricklayer's trowel	With a triangular blade; can be helpful in transferring a small amount of mortar from the container in which you've mixed it to the hawk.
Tuckpointing trowel	Sometimes called a **joint trowel**; a flat piece of metal, approximately 1/2" wide, bent to fit into the brick joints.

FILL AND TOOL THE JOINTS



Side view of bricks, hawk and tuckpoint trowel

If you place the hawk tightly against the wall you are working on, and right at the bottom of the joint, you can slide the mortar into the joint with the tuckpointing trowel for a nice, neat job. Pack the mortar in as much as you can. After it sets up for about ten minutes, you can then go over it again with the trowel to smooth it over. (This process is called **"tooling."**) Since the depth of the mortar between the bricks can vary from house to house, according to

the bricklaying style used, you'll want to make sure that the replacement mortar matches the “look” of the original mortar around it.

CLEAN UP

Probably the most common question about tuckpointing is how to remove mortar that gets on the front of the bricks. No matter how careful you are, some is bound to get where it shouldn't. Try to clean it up immediately with a wet rag because once it dries, it will be there forever. (You've probably seen a house with the foundation bricks slopped up with mortar – not attractive at all!)

MURIATIC ACID WASH

A simple cleaning with a medium-stiff brush and a **solution of one part muriatic acid to five-ten parts water** will remove that slopped mortar before it hardens, and will help to blend the color of the new mortar with the original. Although this solution is an acid, you don't have to be afraid of it. Just use rubber gloves and take care to avoid breathing in the fumes. This is the only cleaning solution that will work to clean up the excess mortar.

With a little care and this follow-up cleaning, your tuckpointing job can look as good as a professional's. It's a job that almost anyone can do – it doesn't require much physical labor, and it doesn't all have to be done at one time – but it will go a long way in preserving the brickwork of your house.

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**

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