HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

SIDING OPTIONS

For houses and garages

There are an increasing number of options—both traditional materials and new products—that can be used to replace existing siding or to finish new construction (such as an addition or a new garage). Some of these new products are easy to install, have minimal maintenance, and hold up well. Others are less durable. Let's look at the options currently available, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

RECOMMENDED CHOICES

SHIP LAP OR DROP LAP SIDING

This tongue-and-groove type of wood siding has been a longtime standby. Until recently, it was the type most commonly used on houses and garages. Each piece locks into the pieces above and below it. The siding comes in boards about 6” wide, sold by the foot, and is still available at lumberyards. It is one of the most expensive sidings, and, relatively speaking, takes the longest to install.

WOOD SHINGLES

Wooden siding shingles (rectangular pieces of wood) are most often found on the top half of older houses, but occasionally cover a whole house or garage. Siding shingles are most often made from cedar. They are naturally impervious to water, but are also prone to splitting or cracking and are relatively soft. The shingles are nailed in rows—sometimes even, but occasionally staggered—with each row overlapping the one below it. Shingles are sold in bundles that cover one-third of a square (33.3 square feet) and that contain pieces of wood of varying widths.

FIBER-CEMENT SIDING

Fiber-cement lapboard siding is a fairly recent development. This siding can be smooth, or it can have a rough-sawn wood grain appearance. While it is not very easy to work with for most do-it-yourselfers, and specialty tools are needed to cut the planks, this type of siding will endure more of the dings and bumps that can crack vinyl or dent aluminum. Moreover, it won’t crumble like hardboard or O.S.B. siding if the paint surface wears away, although such “raw” areas can absorb moisture and transfer it to the wood structure behind the siding, causing it to rot. Fiber-cement siding is manufactured with a wood grain appearance and will withstand the ravages of weather, rot, fungus, carpenter ants and termites. It is not completely maintenance-free, however; fiber-cement siding needs to be painted periodically—although a quality paint job will last many years.

VINYL SIDING

Vinyl siding is frequently used on homes, as well as garages. It is inexpensive, installs quickly over existing sheathing, comes in many different colors, and, once up, needs only to be washed annually for maintenance. On the other hand, if it's hit soundly in the winter, it may crack; darker colors tend to fade in the summer sun; and, if you wish to change the color later, you won't be able to paint it. Damaged panels can be replaced with relative ease using just a couple of tools. Vinyl is the siding that will require the least maintenance.

POLYPROPYLENE SIDING

This plastic siding is usually made from recycled materials, and is available in patterns that resemble various styles of traditional wood siding and shingles. It is installed in much the same way as vinyl siding and has many of the

same advantages and disadvantages, but polypropylene is heavier walled than vinyl. As a result, polypropylene siding is less susceptible than vinyl siding to strike damage, but it is also more expensive.

NOT RECOMMENDED

T1-11

Many people explore this product because it is an economical siding choice. T1-11 is a plywood product that comes in two thicknesses, 3/8” and 5/8”. It holds paint well, but it takes longer to paint. T1-11 is readily available in 4’ x 8’ sheets, and can be ordered in sheets 4’ x 10’ or larger. Because of its size, it installs fairly quickly. When nailed in place, it has a rough-sawn appearance; the finished appearance looks like boards of a 4”, 6”, or 8” width hung vertically. It is somewhat difficult to join pieces end-to-end to make heights longer than the standard 8', when that is needed (such as on the gable ends of a garage). The problem is that, if this joint is not protected, the siding can delaminate (peel apart).

> **IF YOU CHOOSE T1-11**
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> If you choose to use T1-11, it's important to ensure that all exposed edges are coated completely with paint to prevent delamination.

HARDBOARD LAP SIDING

Several manufacturers sell this product. Hardboard lap siding is a composite of small chips of wood, compressed in a bath of adhesive to make a board. It is then coated with a paper-like covering. Since it is manufactured, it will come straight, and it will be primed. Its biggest disadvantage is that, if it isn't kept painted or if the covering gets scratched or torn (by a lawn mower, bicycle, etc.), moisture will enter it, swell up the wood, and destroy the siding very quickly. This type of siding is commonly used on economy-model garages—but it really isn't much of a bargain. In fact, some communities have banned hardboard siding altogether.

O.S.B. SIDING

O.S.B. (“Oriented Strand Board”) siding, the next generation of hardboard siding, was introduced more recently. It is made using a process similar to the manufacture of hardboard lap siding, but the adhesive is better, and the way the wood chips are oriented makes for a stronger piece of siding. The covering is also supposed to be more durable. O.S.B. siding can come in several styles of siding (lap or vertical) or in 4' x 8' sheets. Like hardboard lap siding, it comes pre-primed. But, also like the hardboard siding, it is vulnerable to swelling and self-destruction if the covering material becomes torn or if the siding is not painted regularly.

> **WANT LOW MAINTENANCE?**
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> If a low-maintenance siding is your desire, stay away from hardboard and O.S.B. siding.

CONCLUSION

If you will be constructing an addition or building a new garage—or even replacing some of your existing siding materials—weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the siding options available. Your house and garage are long-term investments, so it doesn't pay to be short-sighted about the material you choose. Cost, longevity, and maintenance requirements can vary widely.

CONTRACTING THE WORK?

If you are contracting the work—and particularly if you are purchasing a “kit” garage—look carefully at the type of siding specified; you may wish to upgrade the siding to be included (paying the cost difference involved).

Home Repair Resource center

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

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