HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

PORCH COLUMNS

For do-it-yourself repairs

Many older homes are graced by columns supporting a porch roof. Most of these columns will eventually need repair or replacement, as they suffer the effects of age and weather. With a little know-how, this job can be done by the homeowner on a do-it-yourself basis.

DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF THE REPAIR

The first task is to determine the extent of the repair. Sometimes, you will only need to replace the **plinth** (the bottom trim piece at the base of the column) or the **capital** (the top trim piece). Small holes in the pillar or trim pieces can sometimes be filled with wood putty, or soft spots hardened up with wood hardener. Once the pillar shows signs of significant deterioration, however, it's usually necessary to replace the whole thing.

FINDING A REPLACEMENT COLUMN

Locating a replacement column can be tricky. Some columns are made from aluminum, others from composite materials, and still others from wood. The round-style wood pillars are hollow, made from vertical strips of wood laminated together. Older columns tended to be larger than their modern counterparts – the wooden columns most readily available today are 8" in diameter, while older ones were often 9-1/2". You might be able to match your column at an architectural salvage place; otherwise, you'll probably have to replace all your columns to have them match one another.

If you need to replace all your columns, you may be able to construct hollow square or rectangular box posts *(see Illustration 1)* for far less than you'd pay for round ones. Be sure, however, that the new style is compatible with the architecture of your house. Look at similar houses to see, or talk to an expert in historic preservation if one is available in your city (Cleveland Heights residents can call the City's Planning Department), or consult the preservation experts at the Cleveland Restoration Society (216-426-1000).

It's important that your new pillar have the right "look"; even though a 4" x 4" post may have adequate strength, it will be too insubstantial for the proportion of most porches.

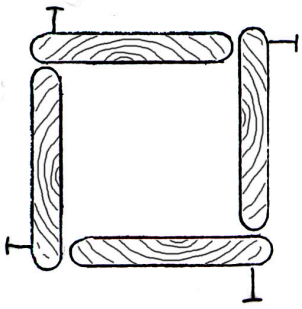


Illustration 1: End view of post. Nail or screw boards together along the outside edges to form a square.

SUPPORTING THE PORCH ROOF

Once you have your replacement parts, the next problem is supporting the porch roof while you do the repair. You can use a **hydraulic jack** to lift the roof; you will only need to raise the roof 1/2" or so, just enough to remove the rotted post.

1. Nail together some 2 x 4's to make two 4" x 4" posts – one to wedge between the floor and the ceiling (or support post) and the other between the jack and the ceiling.
2. Hollow out the bottom of the shorter post with a **1-1/2" paddle bit**, so that the head of the hydraulic jack can be inserted into the wood to hold it securely. (If you have one, a metal jack post can be used in place of this shorter wooden support post.)
3. Position the jack on the porch floor, or on the ground, if necessary; using that shorter post, lift up one side of the roof. When it is high enough that the porch column can be freed, wedge the longer post in place to support the roof at that height.
4. Move the jack to the other side of the porch roof and raise the roof there to an equal height *(see Illustration 2)*.

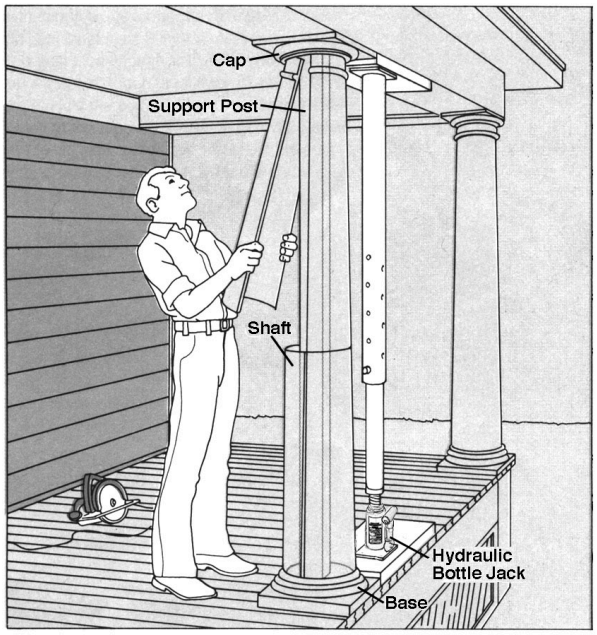


Illustration 2: Supporting the porch roof with a hydraulic bottle jack and support post

NEVER RELY ON THE JACK ALONE

Only when you have the roof supported in two places should you remove the damaged column. **Never rely on the jack alone to hold the roof in place.**

REPAIR AND FINISH

While the roof is supported, make the necessary repairs to the column. If the pillar has a masonry base, you may need to fix the brickwork, in addition to the carpentry repairs. Then, lower the roof onto the columns once again. Finish up with a bead of caulk where the wooden column parts meet the porch floor or the masonry support, plus a coat of enamel trim paint on all wooden elements.

Home Repair Resource center

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

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