



Windows: Repair or replace?

In ancient times, windows were as common as doors in dwellings. But they were merely holes in a wall used to control the amount of light and air that entered a home. Appearance and style were not a consideration.

We've come a long way since then. Today, windows in most homes combine science and technologies that increase energy efficiency and actually reduce heating and air conditioning costs.

Modern windows not only beautify the appearance of a home, they bring sunlight in during winter, while preventing the warmth created from escaping outdoors. Windows also insulate a home from heat during the summer and keep cooled air from escaping.

When deciding whether to repair or replace your existing windows, begin by considering their age and condition. Poorly designed, constructed and placed windows can cost money through heat loss.

Increasing efficiency

If your home is more than 30 years old and still has the original windows, chances are your windows are not keeping you as warm or as cool as well-placed and installed newer models. But, there are measures you can take to increase their efficiency:

- Tighten the seal around the windows with weatherstripping. There are many different types of weather-stripping available for use on wood, metal, aluminum and vinyl. One of the easiest to apply is caulking cord which comes in a roll. All you do is press the cord into place to make a tight seal.
- Every window not made of insulated glass should have a storm window. If your home has storm windows, ensure they are in good condition and install them properly before the cold season begins. When those icy winter winds start blowing, both you and your pocketbook will notice.
- If your home doesn't have storm windows, or they are in poor condition, you can get as good or better protection using heavy-gauge clear plastic sheeting. Seal it tightly over your existing windows and you have an inexpensive and effective alternative.

Replacing windows

Replacing existing windows with more energy efficient models doesn't have to be done all at once. Begin by replacing the ones causing the most heat loss, such as the large picture windows in your living and dining rooms. Replacing windows in stages over a period of years costs less up front and still increases energy efficiency.

With the variety of windows on the market today, however, it pays to shop around. Before making a decision, consider the principle types of windows available:

- The common window types are: double-hung, casement, stationary, awning and horizontal sliding. They may be made of wood, aluminum or vinyl or a combination of these materials. Almost all feature insulated glass and easy-to-clean designs that provide tight seals and eliminate draftiness.

Whether you plan to install the new windows yourself or have them installed professionally, be sure to visit a number of suppliers and study the various products and options on the market. You want to select windows that augment the appearance of your home, increase energy efficiency and give you the most value for your money.