

Selecting Siding for Your Home

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Re-siding your house is a dramatic way to change its appearance, since you are changing the largest and most visible area of the house. The siding you choose can define or express the architecture of the house. It can hide flaws or make an addition look less like an "add-on."

Re-siding lets you make other improvements to the house, such as adding new windows, new trim and extra insulation. If the old siding is removed, you can repair any moisture damage inside the wall.

Siding is a substantial investment for most people, and it's generally not a do-it-yourself project. You'll find that it pays to compare various siding types, to learn what their warranties cover, and to discuss the siding project and costs with several contractors before you get underway. The following are among the most commonly asked questions and answers about siding. They should help you make a better decision about whether siding is an improvement that's right for your house.

Is siding a good investment?

The answer to that question may depend on who you talk to. Siding manufacturers and contractors point out that siding raises the value of your home and reduces maintenance costs. The cost of siding installed by a contractor may range from \$3,000 to more than \$15,000. Painting your house every five years may cost \$1,000 each

time — less, if you do it yourself. Some home appraisers consider siding to be a maintenance item rather than a home improvement or remodeling project. They suggest that new siding may not dramatically increase the value of your home unless the existing siding is in poor condition. You can expect to get back 40 to 60 percent of the cost of the siding. But if you are planning to put your house on the market, repainting may be more cost effective than new siding.

If you decide on new siding, you may need a home improvement loan through a commercial bank or savings institution. These loans have repayment periods of up to 10 years. Shop around for the best interest rates, just like you would for the siding. FHA/HUD (Federal Housing Administration/Housing and Urban Development) Title I loans with a 15 year repayment period are available to qualified borrowers. Check in the "U.S. Government" listings in your phone directory for the office nearest you.

Which siding is best?

Appearance: The siding that is right for your house will depend on the look you want and the characteristics of the siding materials. If you want to change the style of your house, you'll need to think about color, texture and the material itself. Clapboard siding suggests a traditional look, no matter whether the siding is wood, vinyl or aluminum. Hardboard panels with a vertical pattern suggest a contemporary look.

Some types of siding allow you a wider range of colors. Plywood, hardboard and natural wood sidings can be painted or stained almost any color. Aluminum and vinyl sidings have a more restrained color palette — usually pastels and light colors, although dark colors are becoming more available.

Sidings also offer different textures. Wood sidings have a rough, natural texture or are known for the look of wood grain. Aluminum, vinyl and hardboard sidings can have a smooth or embossed surface that imitates wood texture. If you prefer a more formal or traditional look, the smoother siding may be your choice.

Materials: Your choice includes wood, aluminum, and vinyl. Specialty sidings of brick and stone veneer are also available, but are not discussed in this publication.

Wood siding is considered the most traditional material, and is associated with a warm or natural look. Wood can be applied as clapboards (wooden planks put up individually) with either a smooth or rough-sawn surface. Clapboard with edge-grain or vertical-grain are less prone to swelling and contracting with changes in humidity. The finish should also last longer than clapboard with flat-grain or face-grain.

Cedar and redwood are considered low-maintenance woods and they are less subject to decay and insect damage. They still require periodic coatings of a water repellent preservative, even if you choose the natural or weathered

look instead of a stain finish. Expect these siding materials to last up to 40 years, with proper treatment.

Redwood and cedar for exterior use come in several grades, depending on the grain type and the knots and defects. Top-of-the-line cedar or redwood siding would be characterized as "vertical grain siding, clear all heart." Translated, this means you would be getting the premium grain cut, free of knots, cut from the center of the tree — the best (and most expensive) redwood or cedar siding. If you select pine, cypress or fir, remember that the term "clear" or "#1" signify the premium grades.

Natural wood siding products are available as boards, shingles and shakes or in panels.

Plywood siding is less expensive than the wood sidings we've already discussed. It's strong and durable, made of several thin layers of wood bonded together with adhesives. There are four basic grades or classifications given by the American Plywood Association. The grade depends on the number of patches used in the top or finish veneer. Douglas fir is a common veneer, but cedar and redwood are also available. If you are going to paint the siding, lower-grade plywood may be sufficient. The patches will be hidden under the paint and won't interfere with the performance of the siding.

Plywood siding comes in many designs, including vertical or lap siding resembling clapboard. One popular plywood siding has vertical grooves spaced 4, 8, or 12 inches apart, giving a contemporary flavor. Surfaces range from smooth to rough-hewn.

Hardboard siding is compressed wood chips bonded together under heat and pressure. It comes in panels and planks, with panels

being more common. Hardboard, because of its fabricating process, won't delaminate, splinter or warp. It also has no grain, knots and other defects found in natural wood. It can be textured, embossed or molded to resemble natural wood siding and shakes. Be sure to check the finish warranty and the substrate warranty. The substrate is the layer under the siding finish.

Aluminum siding is a synthetic siding that has low upkeep as a strong selling point. Wood sidings are attractive and natural-looking, but require regular maintenance (cleaning, staining, painting, preservatives). Aluminum and vinyl sidings, on the other hand, don't need more than a once-a-year hosing down or use of a mild detergent on areas where the siding has gotten dirty.

Aluminum siding is durable, not subject to moisture or insect damage, is fireproof, and comes in a wide range of colors and textures. Premium coatings have good color retention, chalk resistance, and mildew resistance. If the finish is marred, it can be repainted using special paints made for the siding. Because it is a metal siding with a finish coat of color, the siding is susceptible to scratching and denting. The homeowner can either live with the dents or replace the damaged panel. While thickness was one mark of quality aluminum siding, new techniques have made thinner siding possible without sacrificing strength. Quality aluminum siding gauges can run from a thickness of 0.019" to 0.024", depending on whether there is a pre-bonded backer board attached.

In the last five years, vinyl siding has captured much of the market from aluminum siding. Vinyl is a little less expensive than aluminum, with similar characteris-

tics of strength and low maintenance. Smooth and wood-like textures are available finishes, although the textures are shallower-looking than on aluminum siding.

Vinyl siding comes mainly in pastels and light colors, but the use of new stabilizers has made dark colors more available. Color is introduced into the vinyl when it is made, so that it goes all the way through the siding, rather than being a top finish. When vinyl is scratched, the scratch is less noticeable because the color goes throughout the material. It does not dent as easily as aluminum, and is quieter in windy conditions.

Vinyl is subject to fading and exposure to sunlight makes it more brittle. While the paint on aluminum siding is also subject to ultraviolet degradation from the sun, the base material or substrate is more stable, so it won't become brittle.

Proper installation is critical for achieving a quality look with vinyl siding. Changes in temperature may cause expansion or contraction, and proper installation includes precise cutting and fitting to allow for this. Vinyl courses are designed with long horizontal nail openings to let the siding "float" along the surface of the house when the temperature changes. If the siding is nailed too tightly, it may buckle or crack at the point of nailing.

Thicker is better where vinyl is concerned. Grades above .040" resist warping or distortion from extreme temperatures. In North Carolina summers, unshaded siding can reach temperatures of up to 150 degrees. Thin siding can ripple and wave under these conditions, especially if the installation is not correct.

Can I install the siding myself?

In most cases, siding is best left to professional installers or contractors. The skilled do-it-yourselfer can install wood siding with the proper planning, tools, help and patience. But with aluminum and vinyl sidings, special tools are required. Vinyl siding installation requires careful attention to spacing and nailing. Professional installers usually need six to eight weeks of training to become proficient at installation. Before you tackle the job yourself, consider:

- The manufacturer may not honor warranties if the siding is not installed by a professional.
- The job may be more complex than you anticipated, especially if your house has more than one story, dormer windows or trim that needs to be replaced.
- You may have to buy or rent the tools required.
- A project this big takes time.
- Some home improvement loans don't allow non-professional installation.

Can new siding be installed over the old siding?

It's possible to side over existing siding, but you may not like the final appearance. The new siding will extend further out over windows and doors, making them look recessed.

Also, if you don't remove the old siding, you won't be able to check for moisture damage and make needed repairs before the new siding goes on.

One way to save on your siding installation is to remove the old siding yourself. Check with your siding contractor first.

How long will the siding last?

Siding warranties will vary. Some sidings, like hardboard, may have separate warranties for the finish siding and the substrate. On the average, most quality sidings will have at least a 20-year warranty. Warranties may also cover special provisions, such as a guarantee against cracking or fading. They may also be transferable if you sell the house.

What repairs should be made before siding? What should be made while siding?

When the old siding is removed, it will be easy to check for moisture damage to the sheathing. Replace all decayed or damaged wood before residing. Add drip caps above the foundation, over the windows and doors and at the edge of the roof deck.

Many manufacturers offer a line of accessory products that can be added with the new siding. These include door and window trim, fascia boards and soffit boards, and gutters and downspouts.

This may be a good time to add insulation. The insulation backer boards that come with siding provide very little real insulating

value. Polystyrene and polyurethane insulation boards can be used to improve the insulation value of the wall. If foil-backed insulation board is used, the foil should be perforated so that moisture will not be trapped in the wall. If an air infiltration barrier is used, it should be the type that "breathes" or lets moisture vapor pass through the wall to the outside. Tyvek is one brand of air infiltration barrier that lets the wall breathe.

Summary

Adding new siding to your house can improve its appearance and value, but you should consider the condition of the existing exterior finish and whether you can recover your investment when you sell. Consider advantages and disadvantages of various materials, as well as the cost, before you decide. Some siding materials, like vinyl and aluminum, have advantages of low maintenance and high durability, but may not be available in all colors. Other siding materials, like wood products, are available in natural finishes or can be painted or stained nearly any color. They may also require more maintenance.

Usually installation of siding is not a job for the do-it-yourselfer, unless you have time, patience, skills and the right tools for the job.

As you improve your home, you may find useful ideas or information in the other publications in Extension's series *New Faces for Old Places*. These publications are available from your county extension office.

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