

Rehabbing Clapboards

A plug, Dutchman patch, or smear of well-placed glue is all that's often needed to put a stretch of siding back in service.

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Clapboards are the original, indigenous siding of North America and the great-grand-daddy of all horizontal wood siding, be it a modern look-alike, such as tongue-and-groove bevel siding, or decoratively milled variations like drop or novelty siding. Because they're made from wood, over time clapboards and their siding relatives can suffer the effects of aging, such as cracks and splits (often the result of weak spots along the grain), injury from storms, or holes and cuts from alterations. Left alone, splits and holes are not only unsightly and difficult to paint, they also allow drafts, water, and insects to intrude. Whatever the cause, it's usually possible and more practical to avoid residing major areas of the wall by repairing individual siding boards with some traditional methods.

Small Repairs

Cracks and splits repair well and with ease because there's still sound wood to work with; it's just displaced from its proper position. Start by carefully prying the split open a few fractions of an inch using stiff putty knives and wood wedges. Next, clean out any debris (dirt, paint, or stray splinters from the siding itself), remove the wedges and putty knives, and

check to see that the split halves fit back together neatly in a dry fit. Now, wedge the split open again and coat both edges with a weather-resistant glue (carpenter's glue or polyurethane glue) or epoxy adhesive, using an artist's palette knife or a glue syringe. Then, remove the wedges and squeeze the split closed until it's snug. Hold it in place until the adhesive dries by temporarily attaching a few wood blocks under the butt of the clapboard. Use slim-shank screws, not nails, and be careful not to split the clapboard into which you are driving the screws.

If a clapboard suffers from a gouge or hole—the result, say, of a long-gone telephone or gas line installation—you can make an efficient repair with a plug. For holes smaller than $\frac{3}{8}$ " in diameter, buy a plug cutter at a good hardware store or woodworking supplier, and then cut a plug from a piece of scrap siding. Next, bore out the damaged area to the diameter of the plug, and test-fit the plug in the hole. Finally, coat the plug and hole with adhesive, and insert the plug, orienting its grain in the same direction of the clapboard grain so that if the plug gets wet,



These old utility holes could have been repaired with plugs, but since the damage has grown into a split, they call for a Dutchman patch.



The first step is to cut the patch material, then lay it over the damage and trace the outline. Right: Next saw to the end lines with a cross-cut saw.





Then split out the damaged wood with a hammer and chisel, working evenly to the top line.

it will not split the siding as it expands. Once the adhesive is cured, plane and sand the plug flush with the clapboard surface. For large holes, follow the same procedure using a hole saw to bore out the damaged area with, say, a 2"-diameter hole saw and then cut a mating plug with a 2 1/8" hole saw.

Larger Repairs

When the damage is a large surface split or a missing sliver—a significant loss of material, but not the full width of the board—you can switch to Dutchman repair or wood splice. First, cut a replacement piece out of an old or new clapboard of matching thickness, slightly larger than the damaged part. Next, lay the patch piece over the

damaged area, and trace its outline on the board with a sharp pencil. Then, using a fine-toothed cross-cut saw, cut across the wood grain to the end lines taking care to avoid making kerf marks in the board below. Finally, split out the damaged wood with a mallet and chisel. Chisel evenly to the top line, working off the grain—the direction in which the grain runs away from the line—and the chisel won't start an unintentional split.

When you have the repair cavity squared up to your lines, test-fit the new patch. Afterwards, create a clamping system by tacking two nails below the replacement patch, and make two slim wedges out of sawn



Below: Test-fit the patch in the new hole, and create a clamp with slim wedges supported by a couple of nails.



Left: Remove the patch, apply waterproof glue to all edges, then clamp in place with slim wedges.

When the adhesive has cured, remove the wedges and nails and the repair is done. Dressing the surface with sandpaper or epoxy filler helps blend the Dutchman into the surrounding clapboard.



shingles to slide between the nails and the bottom edge of the patch. This system will force the patch up into place against the surrounding clapboard. Remove the patch and coat all edges with waterproof adhesive. Then replace the adhesive and slide in the wedges to clamp the part in place. When the adhesive has cured, remove the wedges and nails, clean up the surface, and the repair is complete.

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