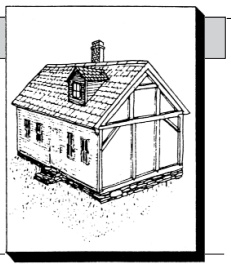


Minor Repairs of Clapboards

by Larry Jones

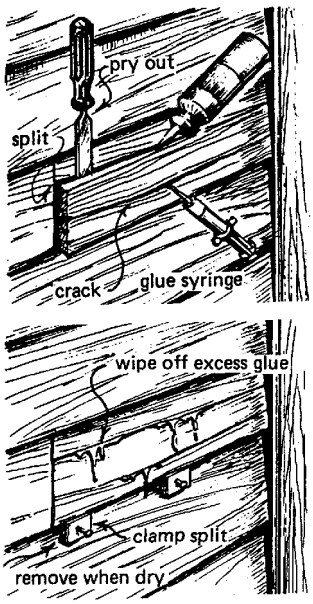
Most wood siding is salvageable, even if some boards are warped, cracked, rotting or half missing. The trick is to selectively repair and replace only the boards that need it, rather than ripping off all the old clapboards and re-siding the house. Damaged boards not only are unsightly and hard to keep painted, but they allow rot to take hold and admit moisture, cold air and even little animals.

Making Repairs

Cracks and splits are easily repaired: Gently open them a little bit, clean out any debris, and evenly coat both edges with a two-part phenol resorcinol waterproof wood glue, such as those made by Weldwood or U.S. Plywood. Try using an artist's pallet knife to spread the glue.

Squeeze the split snugly together, using a little wood block and one or two nails to hold it until dry. Be careful not to split the siding with the nails. The resorcinol doesn't work well as a filler, so wipe off the excess.

Next, scrape and prime the salvageable



Repairing cracks and splits in clapboards.

boards. After the primer is dry, fill small imperfections with exterior wood filler. Fillers should be applied very sparingly; never use them to span large holes or gaps. Moisture that gets behind a thick filler patch will pop it off and ruin the paint job later. As soon as the filler is dry, sand it smooth and prime the patch before it has a chance to get wet.

Repair larger gouges and holes by drilling them out and inserting plugs. You can buy a plug-cutter bit for your electric drill and cut the plugs from scrap siding. The grain of the wood in the plug should go in the same direction as the siding. If the plugs get wet, they can expand and split the siding, so prime and paint them soon after installation.

A large surface split or missing sliver in a board can be repaired with a dutchman, or wood splice. Use a saw or chisel to tidy up the hole, then cut a new piece of wood to fit. Abatron Inc. has a good range of epoxies and fillers that are useful in these repairs.

Replacing Damaged Siding

In most parts of the country, you still can find beveled, drop and other "novelty siding." But it's not always exactly like the original, so take along a sample of your siding for comparison. It's sometimes quite possible (and cheaper) to adapt locally available, ready-made siding than to have a mill run an exact match for you, but strive for a match so your repairs will not be noticeable.

Any planing, reshaping and sanding required should be done on the back of the boards. If you must have new siding milled, try to find a shop that already has cutter blades that are the right size and shape. Otherwise, you'll have to pay for those along with your siding.

If you do find pre-milled siding that closely matches the original, get picky about the quality of the individual boards. Handpick siding boards from the stack so you can avoid boards that are warped, bowed, cupped, split or knotted. Minor splits on the ends of the boards can be sawed off.

Siding boards are easily damaged during handling and installation, so be careful. If siding has to be stored during construction, stack it carefully to keep it dry and prevent warping.

Removing the Damaged Piece

If just part of a board has been damaged, saw through it and remove only the bad part. Make all joints over studs unless sheathing is present. Use a backsaw, and carefully angle it to avoid cutting the siding below. Electric saws can damage adjacent siding and should be avoided.

After the vertical cut has been made, the board can be split and removed with a hammer and chisel. Don't try to remove the board by pulling out on the bottom, because this can cause the board above to bend and split. You can end up having to remove more siding than you bargained for.

The top inch or so of the damaged siding board usually will remain lodged up under the siding above. If nails are holding the remnant in place, try to pull them out from the surface. If this doesn't do it, gently work small wooden wedges or thin pry bars up under the siding, just enough to allow you to cut and remove the nails. Stanley's mini hacksaw is a good tool for the job.

Cut and test fit the new piece into place. Try for a close joint between the old siding and the new, but avoid filling the joint with rigid adhesives. (The new board will expand and contract.)

The best protection for the exposed end grain of these joints is obtained by dip-soaking the ends in waterproofer and priming before installation. Once in place, seal the joints with a paintable, elastic caulk of good quality.

Putting in the New Piece

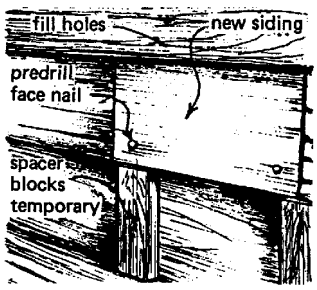
Back-prime new clapboards with primer or stain depending on whether the top coats are to be painted or stained. Seal any knots with a commercial knot sealer formulated for outdoor use—and don't use shellac. In high-moisture areas, consider presoaking or brushing the siding boards with a waterproofer before you prime.

Your patched-in boards should match the exposure of the existing siding. Use simple spacing blocks fashioned from 1x4s and cut to the existing exposure. (A person at each end of the siding board can hold a block in place with one hand and hammer nails into the siding with the other.)

When you are replacing several adjacent courses of siding, be sure to stagger the joints. Vertical joints that line up make the patch more obvious and are prone to leaks.

Predrill holes in the siding to reduce the chances of splitting it when nailing. Nail shiplap siding that is four or six inches wide with one nail per stud. Boards eight inches or more wide are attached with two nails per stud. Use 8d or 10d nails for one-inch-thick siding, and 6d or 8d nails for thinner material. The nails should be long enough to penetrate at least one and a half inches into sheathing and studs. Hot-dipped galvanized, aluminum or stainless-steel nails last the longest and don't stain the wood.

Siding reacts to heat, cold, moisture and wind and tends to tug at the nails. For this reason, barbed or ring-shanked nails have up to 40 percent better holding power than regular nails. Special splitless siding nails are thinner than regular nails and are the best choice.



Nail heads generally are driven in flush with the surface without attempting to countersink and putty their heads.

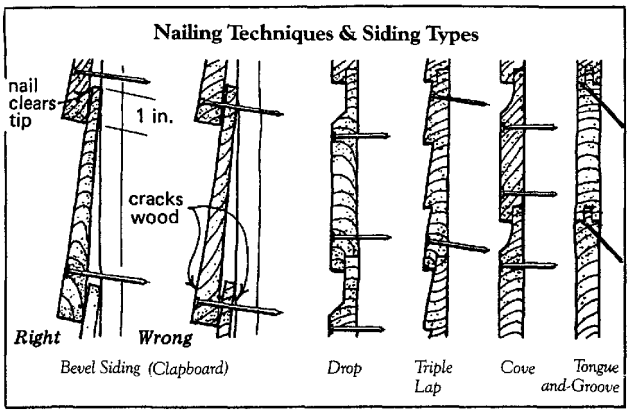
Where corner or window-facing boards cover both ends of the siding, usually only one of the two boards must be removed in order to remove and replace the siding. Occasionally each end of the siding has to be sawn through to get it out, after which the new piece may be sprung into place.

Painting & Maintenance

All new boards should be primed and painted with two top coats of a high-quality, exterior house paint. Advise owners to wash the siding with a mild detergent or plain water at least once a year to remove built-up dirt. (It's not enough to hose down hard-to-reach areas.) Keeping the siding clean extends the paint life.

And tell the owners to inspect the siding for signs of damage and weathering when they undertake their yearly cleaning. Making small repairs early often means the difference between salvaging existing siding and having to replace it entirely. ■

Larry Jones is the senior technical advisor to The Old-House Journal.



Clapboards are beveled siding boards that are less than eight inches wide. Similar siding that is eight inches wide or wider is sometimes called colonial or bungalow. Both types are termed lap siding. Another type of horizontal "novelty" siding is called drop, rustic or cove rustic. This siding is rigid enough to be applied directly to studs, whereas most bevel siding is applied to sheathing.