



ASPHALT DRIVEWAY REPAIR

Those small cracks and depressions in your asphalt driveway can cause a whole lot of destruction. They provide places for water to work its way into and under the pavement; when that water freezes in the winter, it will expand – cracking apart the asphalt and even heaving up whole sections of the driveway, like icebergs. In most cases, the solution to this problem is fairly easy. A few hours of maintenance each fall will help avoid such destruction and extend the life of any asphalt drive.

Asphalt is basically made up of coal tars and fine gravel. When a driveway is installed, this compound is heated, spread out evenly, and compressed in place. After it cools, it becomes hard enough to retain its shape under the weight of your car. However, over the seasons, as the sun and the elements cook out the oils in the coal tar, the gravel is no longer held so tightly together. Cracks develop, and then chunks of asphalt fall out. The trick to ensuring a long life for your drive is keeping it sealed, to slow down the effects of the elements.

Before sealing, you need to fill any cracks and depressions in the existing asphalt. Ideally, this should be done several days before you seal the drive, to allow the materials to cure properly. To repair small cracks (up to about a finger width), use an old screwdriver or masonry chisel to clean all loose or broken materials out of the crack, remove any grass or weeds, and apply an herbicide; then fill the crevice with **crack filler**. (Crack filler usually comes in a one-gallon pour-bottle that you pour right into the crack or in a cartridge that you apply with a caulk gun. It can be purchased at building supply or hardware stores.) The crack filler will harden, but remain pliable enough to stay in place despite temperature extremes.

For larger cracks or shallow craters, first clean them out as described above. Scrape away any build-up of grunge; then, remove oil or grease stains by scrubbing them with driveway cleaner or TSP or by coating them with a primer that covers oil spots. Next, fill the hole with **cold patch**, an asphalt repair material that is available in 80-pound bags at most lumber yards or hardware stores. (If you leave the bags of cold patch in the sun for several hours before installing the material, it will be easier to work with.) After you have filled each hole, use a rake to level it off. Then, compress the filler with a lawn roller, an asphalt tamper, or even your car driven over a board placed on top of the patch. When it has set, in a day or so, the patch will retain its shape.

Chuckholes or potholes are filled in much the same way. Make sure you dig out any dirt or loose materials to a solid base. The patch will hold best if you undercut the edges a bit, so the patch is wider at the bottom than at the top. If the hole is deeper than four inches, fill it with sand to a 4" depth. Then, add the cold patch in 2-inch layers, tamping after each layer. The final layer should start within an inch of the top; mound this last layer of cold patch slightly above the surrounding edges and tamp it down as described previously.

After the crack filler and cold patch have cured, you'll be ready to seal your driveway. **You should do this job each fall** while the weather's still nice (see the product label for the number of hours without rain that the sealer will need to cure, and for the minimum overnight temperature required.) Just as in painting your house, the quality of the material you use for this job will affect

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how long the repair will last. Generally, the more expensive the sealer, the better the quality. Your best bet is to **buy a good quality sealer with some grit or sand in it** to provide traction for wet days and to help fill any small cracks that remain. The product label will tell you how many square feet it will cover, but it's a good idea to buy some extra and return what you don't use. (Some driveways, especially those that haven't been coated recently, can absorb a lot more sealer than you might anticipate!)

For this job, **wear old clothes**, as you usually can't wash out sealer that splashes on your pants. (Use a petroleum-based waterless hand cleaner to remove any sealer that gets on your skin.) Before you start, clear the grass away from the edges and sweep the drive down well. If you didn't do so earlier, remove any oil or grease stains as described above, and rinse the area thoroughly. You're now ready to apply the sealer. Follow the preparation instructions from the manufacturer regarding whether the driveway surface should be wet or dry. Using a power mixer (or stirring by hand with a stick), mix the bucket of sealer thoroughly for about five minutes, making sure that any product that had settled on the bottom is suspended throughout the liquid. Then, starting near the garage, pour a line of sealer across the width of the driveway. Take care not to splash the sealer onto walls, foundations, or garage doors. Spread it evenly with an **asphalt spreader** (a combination squeegee/broom sold where you bought the sealer) to about an 1/8" thickness. When you have spread this first amount, pour another line of sealer and spread it out. Work your way in this manner to the street. (It will help if your buckets of sealer have been positioned at intervals along the drive!) Place a barrier at the end of your drive to warn people to keep off the wet surface.

The product label will tell you how long you'll need to stay off the drive, to give it a chance to dry thoroughly. Avoid tracking the sealer into the house – it will be nearly impossible to clean.