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## Caring for Weatherboard Cladding

To enjoy weatherboard cladding's beauty for a lifetime, maintain it properly and diligently.



Weatherboard cladding can last for a century or more, given the proper care. Weatherboard cladding is one of the most beautiful of all types of cladding—and one of the most expensive. If you'd like to avoid repairs that could cost thousands of dollars, and you'd like to keep your timber cladding or shingles lasting for decades, regular upkeep and maintenance is critical.

### Finish, protect wood cladding

Wood must be properly finished with a paint, stain, or clear sealer. Left unprotected, it's susceptible to rot and decay caused by moisture. Of special concern is the fact that wood expands and contracts with normal changes in humidity and temperature. These fluctuations may cause paint finishes to chip and crack, and over time puts stress on caulked seams around windows, doors, and at corners. If the caulk separates and fails to keep out moisture, wood rot may develop. Even species of wood that have a natural resistance to rot, such as redwood, cypress, and cedar, may decay if not properly protected from the elements.

Paint comes in unlimited colours and can be changed at any time. A house with wood cladding must be repainted at least every five to ten years depending on the quality of paint used, or as soon as the paint finish begins to deteriorate. A DIY paint job requires many hours of labour and is physically very demanding. A professional crew will be your best option if you don't have the time or a head for heights.

Stain is a good choice for wood because it allows the beauty of the grain to show through. Stain penetrates wood fibres and helps seal them against moisture; it's also resistant to the cracking and chipping that affects paint. Because stain is a penetrating sealer—not a coating, like paint—it's difficult to change the colour of previously stained wood. Staining a house is less labour-intensive than painting because prep work is minimal. Using a rented paint sprayer, a two-person DIY team can re-stain a two-story house in 4-5 days.

Clear sealers prevent moisture damage and allow wood to retain its natural colour, but they must be reapplied at least every two years. Clear sealers are formulated to help slow the process that allows ultraviolet light to turn wood silvery gray. However, all natural wood, regardless of species, eventually turns gray when exposed to years of sunlight.

### Clean stains on wood cladding

Dirt is the most common cause of discoloration on wood cladding. Clean annually using warm, soapy water and a soft-bristled brush. Divide your house into sections, clean each section from top to bottom and rinse before moving on.

Mildew appears as black spotty stains. Clean the area with a solution of one part bleach to four parts water. Wear eye protection and protect plants from splashes. Rinse thoroughly with clean water.

Rust stains often appear as dark black splotches and vertical streaks. They're usually caused by a metal fastener, such as a nail or screw, that wasn't galvanized. Contact with moisture causes the fastener to oxidize, leaving streaks. To remove the stain,

dissolve 4 oz. oxalic acid (available at hardware stores and home improvement centres) in 1 cup warm water.

Wear eye protection and acid-proof gloves; avoid splashing the mixture onto adjacent surfaces. Apply the mixture to the stain and gently scrub with a soft bristle brush. Rinse thoroughly with water. Refinish the spot if necessary. Problem nails must be replaced with a galvanized or stainless steel fasteners.

### **Restore the colour of natural wood siding**

Siding that has discoloured with age can be restored to its original colour by applying a wood cleaner or brightener. These products often are intended for use on wood decks, but they work well on natural wood siding. They're available at hardware stores and home improvement centres. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

### **Replace wood cladding**

Replace wood cladding that show signs of damage. The most common damage comes from accidentally hitting the siding with sticks and stones thrown from a lawn mower, or from objects, like cricket balls. Occasionally, wood cladding may crack due to

changes in atmospheric moisture. Repairs to wood cladding require the expertise to remove the damaged boards while leaving surrounding boards intact. Unless you have the skills, hire a professional carpenter or siding contractor.

### **Prevent damage to wood siding**

A house with wood siding is most vulnerable to water infiltration where siding butts against windows, doors, and corner mouldings, says Leon Cupit, a professional house inspector in Tasmania. Cupit also stresses that no bush, tree branches, or shrubbery be allowed to touch the house cladding. Foliage conducts moisture that can find its way into cracks and tiny openings in siding. "You should have enough room to comfortably walk between your house and any plant materials," he says.

To find out more and get your home inspected call your local independent property inspector on **1800 17 88 22** or email [info@ipi.net.au](mailto:info@ipi.net.au)

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