

a newsletter from Home Repair Resource Center

The wooden columns most readily available today are 8" in diameter, while older ones were often 9-1/2". You might be able to match your column at an architectural salvage place; otherwise, you'll probably have to replace all your columns to have them match one another.

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## Porch columns

Many older homes are graced by columns supporting a porch roof. Most of these columns will eventually need repair or replacement, as they suffer the effects of age and weather. With a little know-how, this job can be done by the homeowner on a do-self basis.

The first task is to determine the extent of the repair. Sometimes, you will only need to replace the **plinth** (the bottom trim piece at the base of the column) or the **capital** (the top trim piece.) Small holes in the pillar or trim pieces can sometimes be filled with wood putty, or soft spots hardened up with wood hardener. Once the pillar shows signs of significant deterioration, however, it's usually necessary to replace the whole thing.



Locating a replacement column can be tricky. Some columns are made from aluminum, others from composite materials, and still others from wood. The round-style wood pillars are hollow, made from vertical strips of wood laminated together. Older columns tended to be larger than their modern counterparts – the wooden columns *continued on page 3* 

#### Don't let your wooden steps fall apart!

There are some things you can do to keep your steps in sound condition, if you make the repairs before moisture damages the underlying structure.



# Just a reminder

Our workshop fees are very modest, but you'll save even more by planning ahead! While you can pay for just one class, the multi-class rates are a better value. However, we cannot process the prepaid "punch cards" for multiple workshops at classes held away from the office at private homes. So, if you will be attending one of our "on-site" repair workshops this summer, call before the afternoon of the class. We'll arrange to make a punch card for you and let you know what you'll need to pay when you pick up the card at the workshop.



#### Holiday Closings:

Home Repair Resource Center will be closed on Monday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, for Independence Day and Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup>, for Labor Day

Plan ahead to get any tools or information you'll need.

# New income guidelines for 2010:

Home Repair Resource Center has received from HUD the new federal low- and moderate-income guidelines for this year (see below). There are only a few small changes from 2009. These guidelines apply to Project Repair's tool loan and grants for workshop supply costs; to HRRC's Assist 0% loan, Incentive Grant, Senior Grant, and Deferred Loan Match benefits; and to the City's Free Paint Program, Violation Repair Grant, and Deferred Loan. The modest materials fees charged for our hands-on workshops are also based on the new guidelines; call us or see our website for the updated fee schedule. There are no income restrictions for our Resource Library, and Challenge Fund Loan Guarantee, and our Home How-To women's repair course has higher income limits. If you have questions about your eligibility for any of our services, call our office at (216) 381-9560 or (216) 381-6100.

2010 Low-Moderate Income Guidelines			
<u>Family size</u>	Gross yearly income	Family size	Gross yearly income
1	\$36,300	4	\$51,850
2	41,500	5	56,000
3	46,700	6	60,150

## Porch columns

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most readily available today are 8" in diameter, while older ones were often 9-1/2". You might be able to match your column at an architectural salvage place; otherwise, you'll probably have to replace all your columns to have them match one another.

If you need to replace all your columns, you may be able to construct hollow square or rectangular box posts *(see Illustration 1)* for far less than you'd pay for round ones. Be sure, however, that the new style is compatible with the architecture of your house. (Look at similar houses to see, or talk to the historic preservation expert in the City's Housing Preservation Office.) It's important that your new pillar have the right "look"; even though a 4" x 4" post may have adequate strength, it will be too insubstantial for the proportion of most porches.

Once you have your replacement parts, the next problem is supporting the porch roof while you do the repair. You can use a **hydraulic jack** to lift the roof; you'll only need to raise the roof 1/2" or so, just enough to remove the rotted post. Nail together some 2 x 4's to make two 4" x 4" posts – one to wedge between the floor and the ceiling (or support post) and the other between the jack and the ceiling. Hollow out the bottom of the shorter post with a **1-1/2" paddle bit**, so that the head of the hydraulic jack



End view of post. *Illustration 1:* END VIEW

Nail or screw boards together along the outside edges to form a square.

Small holes in the pillar or trim pieces can sometimes be filled with wood putty, or soft spots hardened up with wood hardener. Once the pillar shows signs of significant deterioration, however, it's usually necessary to replace the whole thing.

can be inserted into the wood to hold it securely. (If you have one, a metal jack post can be used in place of this shorter wooden support post.) Then, position the jack on the porch floor, or on the ground, if necessary; using that shorter post, lift up one side of the roof. When it is high enough that the porch column can be freed, wedge the longer post in place to support the roof at that height. Move the jack to the other side of the porch roof and raise the roof there to an equal height (*see Illustration 2, page 4*). Only when you have the roof supported in two places should you remove the damaged column. *(Never rely on the jack alone to hold the roof in place.)* 

## Porch Columns

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While the roof is supported, make the necessary repairs to the column. If the pillar has a masonry base, you may need to fix the brickwork, in addition to the carpentry repairs. Then, lower the roof onto the columns once again. Finish up with a bead of caulk where the wooden column parts meet the porch floor or the masonry support, plus a coat of enamel trim paint on all wooden elements.

Illustration 2

## HRRC's Financial Fitness/ New Home Buyer Classes

Home Repair Resource Center's interactive Financial Fitness series will help you develop your money skills, provide you with strategies for improving your credit, and teach you how to protect your home investment. Call **381-6100** for information or to reserve your spot in these FREE classes:



July Classes held 6 - 8 p.m. at the CH-UH Main Library, 2345 Lee Road

- 1 Thursday Creditworthy Equals Choices
- 8 Thursday Power of a Personal Budget
- 15 Thursday Understanding Mortgages & Refinancing
- 22 Thursday Avoiding Mortgage Delinquency
- 29 Thursday Home Maintenance for Home Buyers

August Classes held 6 - 8 p.m. at the CH-UH Main Library, 2345 Lee Road

- 3 Tuesday Power of a Personal Budget
- 10 Tuesday Creditworthy Equals Choices
- 17 Tuesday Understanding Mortgages & Refinancing
- 24 Tuesday Avoiding Mortgage Delinquency
- 31 Tuesday Home Maintenance for Home Buyers

# To all tool users:

Each summer, our Tool Loan gets very busy as Project Repair participants undertake their home maintenance and repair projects. Our biggest challenge is getting tools back in a timely manner and on to the next person who needs them. To make this process easier, we are asking tool users to help in the following ways:

- Don't take a tool until you are actually ready to start the project. While we can't do much about weather delays, it's
  always hard when someone must pay a fee for a tool they didn't use. Meanwhile, the tool isn't available to someone else who is ready for it.
- 2. It is your responsibility to know when the tool is due back, and to get it here on time. We have evening hours a couple of days a week, as well as an hour on Saturday during the summer, so we can usually arrange a return time that will work with your schedule – just call us.
- 3. Call the office if you wish to keep a tool longer than the date specified. Extensions are given at the discretion of the Project Repair staff, and depend mostly on demand for the tool.
- 4. If the tool is not in, we may have to place you on a waiting list and call when it becomes available. It's important that we have your current phone number. (Many people are getting rid of land lines and just using a cell phone, but we may not have that number on your card!) It slows down the process for everyone if we can't get hold of you – and you won't get the tool you're waiting for as quickly.
- If you are planning a big "work day" with people coming to help with your project, call ahead to reserve the tools you'll need. But, don't forget to let us know if your plans change!
- 6. Talk to us to make sure the tool is appropriate for your project, and about its safe and proper operation. (If you will not be operating the tool yourself, bring the person who will be using the tool with you when you pick it up, so that person has the chance to ask any questions.) If a tool that you borrow is damaged through misuse or neglect, or if it is lost while in your possession, it will be your responsibility to pay for its repair or replacement.
- 7. Clean all tools before you return them! Hose grass off the bottom of mowers, wipe off snake cables, etc. The only exception is shop vacs – we'll dispose of the debris-filled bag.





# Workshop Schedule

Our summer workshops are held "on site" at the homes of PR participants who have volunteered their exterior repair for a class project. Participants will get experience doing the work in a real world situation. The address for each workshop will be provided to those who register.

All classses are open to Cleveland Heights residents, and payment of a modest **materials fee** is now required. *(See our website for details, or call us for more information.)* Don't forget that multi-class punch cards cannot be purchased at workshops held away from our Teaching Center. Call 381-9560 to reserve your spot in a class or to arrange to get your punch card.

### July

#### Sidewalk Leveling

Monday, July 12th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Learn how to lift a sidewalk block and reset it at the same level as its neighbor. We'll talk about why a block gets out of alignment; how to tell if it can be leveled, rather than replaced; and how to cut a large section into smaller segments with a gas-powered concrete saw.



Monday, July 19th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Save money by replacing a cracked sidewalk block or driveway apron yourself. Learn how to prepare the forms, mix and pour the concrete, and finish the surface. We'll also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various concrete sources.

#### Tuckpointing

Monday, July 26th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Tuckpointing (replacing deteriorated or missing mortar between bricks) is an easy do-self repair in most situations. We'll show you the techniques that will give you a neat and attractive job.

#### Installing a Replacement Window

Monday, Aug. 2nd, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Learn how to remove an existing double-hung window and install a "replacement window" in the opening. We'll discuss how to select a good-quality window and show you how to install it, utilizing strategies to prevent cold drafts from entering the house through the old sash weight cavities.

#### **Glass Block Windows**

Monday, Aug. 9th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

We'll show you how to measure for a custom glass block panel, and how to install the panel into a masonry window opening, like the ones in a basement wall.

#### **Underground Wiring**

Monday, Aug. 16th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

If you want to bury the electrical service to your garage, come learn what's involved in completing the project. We'll talk about code requirements for underground wiring, and then show you how to dig the trench, run wires through conduit, drill a hole in the house foundation, and hook up the wires at the service panel and garage.

#### Installing a Garage Door Opener

Monday, Aug. 23rd, 6-30 - 8:30 p.m.

At this class, you'll learn how to install a typical garage door opener – making the electrical connections and the mechanical connections to the door, and troubleshooting any problems in its operation.

#### Adding an Exterior Outlet

Monday, Aug. 30th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

You'll learn how to run a new circuit and install an outlet on the outside of your house or garage.



# Can you help?

If you are willing to get *Nuts & Bolts* via email, you can save HRRC the cost of printing and mailing your copy. Send your email address to rstager@hrrc-ch.org, with "newsletter address" as the subject.



## Repairing exterior wooden steps

We seldom pay attention to the steps outside our house, until someone falls through a rotting landing or trips on an uneven tread.



If you could view your house through the eyes of a stranger, however, you'd see that steps in poor condition can take away from your home's attractiveness.

There are many different types of steps, and one type is not necessarily better than another. The style of your steps should relate to the type and style of your house. (Note that replacing existing steps with a different style or material may

require approval by the Building Department; check with them about the appropriate procedures.) The most common materials used are **masonry** (brick or stone) and **wood**. It's important to be aware of the problems common to each type, so you can correct them before you have to replace the entire steps.

Wooden steps, even though they weigh much less than brick steps, still need a foundation to support them. They can rest on a concrete sidewalk or a concrete foundation poured for that purpose. (The Building Department can provide information on the size foundation required.) Even with a foundation, however, seasonal changes may cause problems with wooden steps. As the ground shifts with the freeze-and-thaw cycle, wooden steps tend to stay attached to the house, but – because they are lighter and ride on the top of the ground – they may twist. As a result, they may not remain straight and level. The treads may begin to hold standing water, rather than allowing it to run off, which can then cause the boards to rot.

There are a couple of things you can do to remedy this situation. First, if your wooden steps aren't straight or level, and if your steps rest on a concrete sidewalk or other solid footing, you can usually do some shimming underneath the base. Just add small wedges of wood, a little at a time, and keep checking with a level. You want to end up with treads that are straight across, but have a very slight downward slant to the next tread.

If you must replace any part of your wooden steps, consider using treated outdoor wood. This wood is guaranteed for about thirty years against rotting, and the tree from which it comes makes for a stronger-than-average board. Use the board you are replacing as a pattern to cut your new piece. If you replace the treads before the water has a chance to get underneath them and rot the framework *continued on page 9* 

## Repairing exterior wooden steps

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supporting them, you can probably avoid having to replace the entire set of steps.

If you must replace a set of wooden steps that has deteriorated too far to be repaired, there are some things to keep in mind to ensure a long-lasting replacement – whether the steps are built by you or by a contractor. First,

If your steps rest on a concrete sidewalk or other solid footing, you can usually do some shimming underneath the base. Just add small wedges of wood, a little at a time, and keep checking with a level. You want to end up with treads that are straight across, but have a very slight downward slant to the next tread.

replacing your steps is a permit job, and you will have to meet current code requirements. A concrete foundation will be required, to give your steps a solid footing, and any steps leading to a door that swings out will need to have a landing, to prevent falls. (Note that, if you don't presently have a landing, you may need to redesign the layout of your steps to incorporate one.) Second, make sure that you use outdoor treated wood. This type of wood can be left unpainted permanently or, if you prefer, can be painted after it weathers for a year. Third, if the span of your steps is more than three feet, make sure to install a center riser to provide support. Finally, place a small gap between the boards making up the stair tread to allow water to run off. *(For more detailed how-to instructions, see the handout on "Building Wooden Steps" in our Resource Library and/or our video on "Building Wooden Steps, Landing, and Rails.")* 

# HRRC has answers

As a HUD-certified counseling agency, Home Repair Resource Center can help people with **all aspects of home ownership**. Whether you're planning a to buy a home, trying to budget for home repairs, thinking about refinancing, or worried about making your mortgage payment, our experienced housing counselors can review your situation with you and help you evaluate your options. We can also help people faced with the possibility of losing their home to foreclosure.

Counselors **Denise Black, Doris Honsa**, and **Gail Jackson** welcome your calls. Their best advice is to talk with them as soon as the question arises, while you have the most possible options.

HRRC's housing counseling is **free** and open to all Ohio residents. So, call (216) 381-6100 with your questions.



Yeah, I know that it's just early summer, but you've got to get started sometime. And, I'll admit that I have to really push myself to think about weatherproofing now. But, the memory of all those high heating bills last winter can prod me off the couch, as well as the thought that caulking will be easier and a lot more pleasant to do in warm weather than when it's cold. So, let's talk about how to make your house more airtight before the cold hits again.

Start by looking for gaps around the trim surrounding windows and doors, and fill

them with caulk. Be sure to use a paintable caulk that is rated for 30 years or more. Check the trim inside, and caulk gaps between the wood and the plaster walls. Then, check the outside trim, and caulk any gaps between the trim and adjacent surfaces (siding, masonry, etc.)

In addition to caulking around your windows (including the ones in the basement), install weather-stripping to minimize airflow between the sash and frame. Don't forget your entry doors, as well; install new weather-stripping or replace existing weather-stripping that's become worn.

Take some precautions when using this product. Wear old clothing that covers most of your skin, gloves, and safety glasses, because polyurethane foam is a very effective adhesive. You'll be wearing it for a long time if you don't cover up.



Another area to weatherize is in the basement itself. Just last week, I was in a basement where I could see daylight between where the foundation wall ended and the wood framing for the house began. (I actually found ivy growing through that gap!) In our area, where most of the houses were built in the 1920's, the builders commonly laid the sill plate (the board that rests on top of the foundation) in a bed of mortar, to ensure that the house started out level. Over the years, some of the mortar can crumble away, leaving gaps like the one I saw. While you can use caulk to fill smaller gaps, for this area I prefer to use a polyurethane spray foam called **Great Stuff<sup>TM</sup>**. This product swells to fill all of the void and does not absorb moisture. *continued on page 11* 

## The Short Circuit

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Spray foam is also good for small-to-medium jobs, such as sealing around water pipes, wiring, or fixtures that pass through the walls, and around electrical boxes on exterior walls – all those "hidden heat leaks" that waste your heating dollars.

Take some precautions when using this product. Wear old clothing that covers most of your skin, gloves, and safety glasses, because polyurethane foam is a very effective adhesive. You'll be wearing it for a long time if you don't cover up. Try to plan your project so the entire can will be used at once, as the spray valve tends to block up once the product is applied, and it's difficult to clean the valve and applicator tubing for re-use.

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Another thing to be aware of when using expanding foam products is that some of them will swell out a door jamb or window frame. Years ago when **Great Stuff<sup>TM</sup>**, first came out, I thought I'd try it to seal the gap between the jambs and a new door frame I had built for an apartment building. I sprayed the foam into the gap, filling it, and then went off to lunch, returning an hour later. The foam sealed the gap just fine – but it swelled the jambs so much that I couldn't hang the door back onto the hinges. I had to cut out most of the foam in order to get the door back in the frame. Since then, the manufacturer has cured that problem by creating a "window and door foam" that doesn't expand as much. But before you use any of this stuff – READ THE LABEL! With the right product, you can use it to create an air seal around a replacement window or door and not worry about it over-expanding and warping the frame.

Store unused cans upright in a cool (not cold) room. Another thing that I have learned (the hard way) is that, if you don't think you'll use the can in the next 45 to 60 days, you should return it to the store for a refund. I've had unused cans harden up in storage, so hang on to your receipt and don't waste your hard-earned cash.

If all this hasn't inspired you to start winterizing, here's one more incentive. Sealing your house to make it warmer next winter will also keep it cooler this summer. So, after you've caulked, sealed, and weatherstripped, sit back with a cool lemonade and enjoy the fruits of your labor.



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