

Home Tips

Tom Feiza's Tips For Operating Your Home

Restore Your Aluminum or Vinyl Siding

Restore your siding? That's right! Oh – you thought siding was forever and never needed any attention. Well, if you own a home with older siding, you know it just ain't so. Aluminum siding becomes dingy, dirty, and faded with time. Vinyl siding becomes dingy and dirty. Both types can become stained and damaged. The good news is that you can restore siding with a little effort and very little cost. You can't remove those dings and scratches, but you can restore the color and appearance.

VINYL SIDING

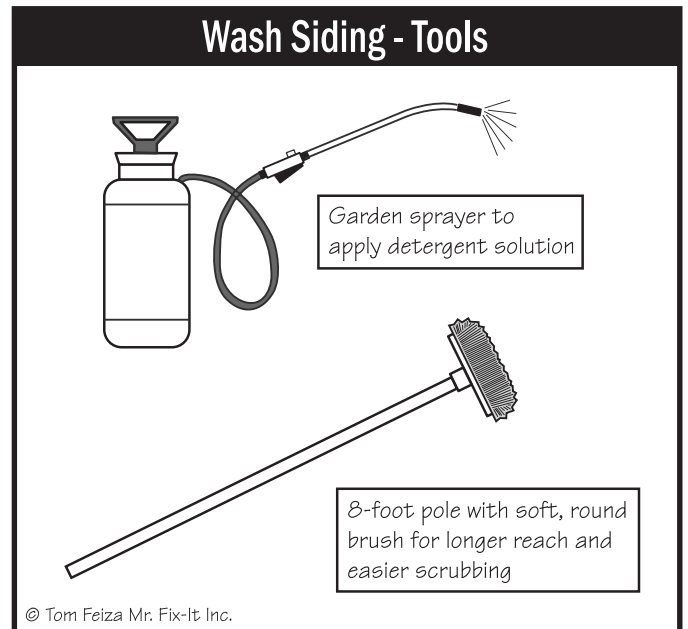
Most vinyl siding is resistant to fading, including sun fading, because the color runs through the material. But vinyl siding will become discolored in time, and it can be stained by a variety of common chemicals and products used around a home.

WASHING VINYL SIDING

Vinyl siding can be washed with a mild detergent and water. While you can use a high-pressure power washer, I don't recommend this – it is not required, and it can drive water up under the siding and damage caulk.

In many cases, you can use laundry detergent and water to wash siding. I suggest spraying down the surface with a garden hose to loosen surface deposits and wet the surface. Then apply a mild detergent solution with a garden sprayer, or work from a bucket full of detergent solution with a long-handled brush.

Mix a mild solution of laundry detergent, Spic and Span, Soilax or similar detergent. You don't need a strong solution. I like using a soft brush on a long handle; it extends your reach, and you can use your legs and upper body in the scrubbing motion, not just your arms. Use a 6-foot broom-type handle and a soft brush designed for washing cars.



MO41

Once you've lightly scrubbed the surface, allow the solution to soak, and then rinse with clear water from a garden hose. Always wash from the bottom up and keep the area below wet to prevent stains from cleaning solution running across dry siding.

For mildew, mold or algae stains, I suggest washing the surface with Jomax, a detergent product that activates laundry bleach to make it a stronger cleaner. A small bottle of Jomax costs a few dollars and makes 2 1/2 gallons of cleaning solution when combined with water and laundry bleach. Use the Jomax solution as described above for the cleaning solution. Follow all safety precautions recommended by Jomax, and protect plant materials in your work area.

STAINS

For stubborn stains on vinyl siding, the Vinyl Siding Institute recommends the following products. You can also contact the institute at 1-888-367-8741 or www.vinylsiding.org. They provide information on certified products.

STAIN

CLEANER

Crayon

Lestoil

Felt-tip pen

Fantastik, water-based cleaners

Grass

Fantastik, Lysol, Murphy Oil Soap, Windex

Grease, oil

Fantastik, Lysol, Murphy Oil Soap, Windex

Rust

Fantastik, Murphy Oil Soap, Windex

Tar

Soft Scrub

Dirt, soil

Fantastik, Lestoil, Murphy Oil Soap

When using these cleaners, follow label directions and rinse well with water before the cleaner dries on the surface.

PAINT VINYL SIDING?

I don't suggest painting vinyl siding. It is too difficult for paint products to bond properly to vinyl siding.

ALUMINUM SIDING

WEATHER, POLLUTION AND TIME TAKE THEIR TOLL

Your "maintenance-free" aluminum siding is attacked year after year by sun, rain and pollution. Eventually the surface paint becomes faded and rough, and the paint is worn thin. (That's right – aluminum siding has a surface coat of paint.) Dark colors often turn several shades lighter. Dark brown becomes muddy purple; a bright spicy mustard color becomes Grey Poupon.

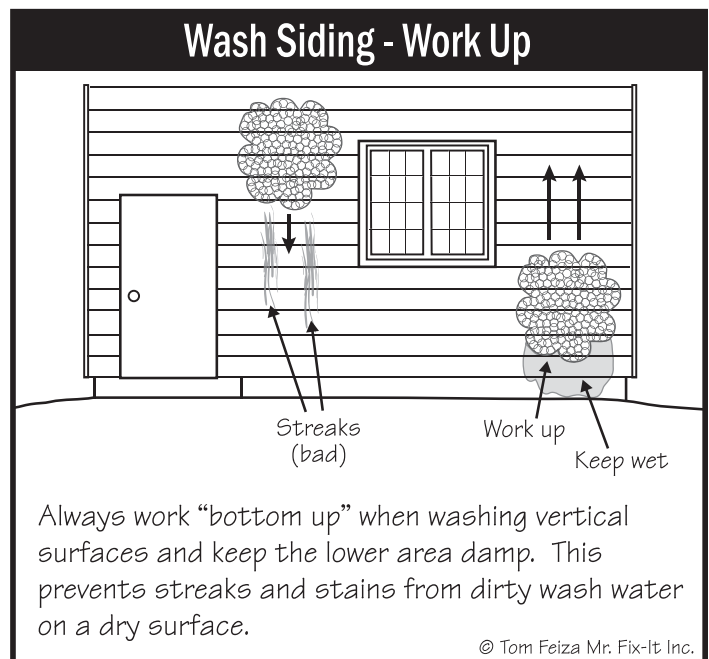
Sunlight's ultraviolet rays attack the paint and fade the color. Airborne pollution eats and roughens the surface, making it susceptible to future damage. Paint is also designed to "chalk" or slowly lose its surface coating to rain. Chalking keeps the top surface relatively clean, but eventually the top coat may become so thin that the color is lost.

FIRST STEP – CLEAN THE SURFACE

Clean the surface with detergent and a good scrubbing. For proper cleaning you will need a strong detergent, scrub brush and hose. You can use MEX, TSP substitute, siding cleaner, Soilax, Spic and Span or a similar detergent. Mix a strong solution in hot water.

Test a small area with your cleaning solution, and adjust the mixture or try other chemicals as needed. You should try several mixtures to find the best cleaner for your siding. If the surface has gray stains, this is likely mildew. A cup or two of laundry bleach in your cleaning solution will make the mildew disappear. (However, never mix bleach with products that contain ammonia.) Follow all the instructions and safety precautions for the product you are using. Use skin and eye protection.

Scrub the siding starting bottom up. If you start at the top, you risk creating streaks on lower surfaces that will etch into the surface and cannot be removed (see illustration M040). Make sure the area below the scrubbing remains wet so dirty solution does not touch dry siding. Rinse as you go, and always rinse before a cleaned area dries.



M040

For extensive mildew, mold or algae stains, wash the surface with Jomax, a detergent product that activates laundry bleach to make it a stronger cleaner. A small bottle of Jomax costs a few dollars and makes 2 1/2 gallons of cleaning solution when combined with

water and laundry bleach. Use the Jomax solution as described above for the cleaning solution. Follow all safety precautions recommended by Jomax, and protect plant materials in your work area.

To ease the scrubbing chore, use one of the long-handled brushes designed to wash large vans. The bristles are soft, and you can reach most areas on a single-story home from the ground. To speed the process, try wetting the surface with spray from a garden hose and then applying the cleaning solution with a small garden sprayer. Allow the solution to soak for a few minutes before you scrub.

As you clean the surface, rinse well with water from a hose. Some of the chemicals you use may damage plant materials, so protect any plants in the area.

A high-pressure water wash can aid in the initial cleaning, applying cleaning solution, and rinsing, but it can't substitute for scrubbing. While you can use a high-pressure power washer, I don't recommend this – it is not required, and it can drive water up under the siding and damage caulk. It takes a little friction to remove surface dirt. Have you ever seen a car washed with a water spray only? Scrubbing is what really cleans a car – or your siding.

RESTORE THE COLOR WITHOUT PAINT

If you want to restore the color and avoid painting, a simple cleaning may not be effective. It may take some heavy-duty scrubbing and strong chemicals to remove the faded surface paint and reveal the original color.

A friend of mine successfully used a mixture of one gallon water, 1/3 cup Soilax and 1/2 cup Tide. He scrubbed the surface until the original dark brown color was restored. A deck cleaner such as Deckswood or ZAR Wood Brightener may also be effective, but test a small out-of-the way area first, since these strong chemicals can also damage the paint surface.

When removing oxidized (faded) paint, you must apply the cleaner and scrub vigorously until the siding returns to its original color. A stiffer brush or scrubbing pad may be required. The wet, scrubbed area may also need a good rubbing with a clean, detergent-dampened cloth to remove paint residue. The cloth will absorb the damaged surface paint, and you will need to change cloths frequently. Finally, rinse the area well with lots of water.

RESTORE THE LUSTER AND DARKEN THE COLOR

If the paint is near its original color and still in good condition after cleaning, you can restore luster and enhance the color with Armor All (The car care product) or Penetrol. This will not work for paint that is thin or badly discolored.

After the siding is dry, apply the Armorall or Penetrol with a rag. Coat the surface and buff off any excess. The instructions for Penetrol suggest removing the excess after five minutes. The Armorall instructions suggest removing the excess after several hours or overnight. The process may require several coats for additional luster and protection.

Penetrol and Armorall are available at most paint or hardware stores. Don't expect to find anyone who has used these products to restore aluminum siding – it is not commonly done. You will need to search the label carefully for information on use, since the labels don't specifically describe using the products on aluminum siding.

I have seen both products successfully used to make siding look like new. You will want to test a small area and practice your technique before you tackle the whole house.

PAINTING

To change color or restore severely worn surfaces, paint is a great option. A paint job will hold up almost as well as a factory finish if you use quality materials. Metal surfaces hold paint better because they don't allow moisture to move through the surface. Metal doesn't "breathe" moisture as wood does, and metal will not move, twist and crack the way natural materials do.

The hardest and most important part of painting is surface cleaning and preparation. (We have already done that.) Paint will not adhere to a dirty surface. After proper cleaning, you should caulk joints and holes and patch any damage in the siding. Small holes and other damage can be patched with caulk or an exterior filler. Use a material that can be painted.

Select the best quality paint, one that is 100 percent acrylic. The 100 percent acrylic paint will bond well to the metal and dry to a hard, smooth surface. Acrylics have good leveling characteristics and will level out most of the brush marks. Some manufac-

turers offer paint specifically designed for aluminum siding, while others recommend their top-of-the-line acrylic. Don't scrimp on paint – buy the best.

FINAL PAINTING TIPS

Priming often is not necessary if you have cleaned the surface well. Follow the specific instructions for the finish paint you buy. If the surface is still excessively chalky after cleaning, you may need to prime the surface. You should spot-prime any patches, bare metal, or metal that has oxidized with white powdered residue. Painting a light color over dark will often require a primer. Glossy surfaces must be dulled.

Can the paint be sprayed on? Sure, if enough is applied. You can also use a brush, roller or pad applicator. Don't paint in direct sunlight, because the surface will dry too quickly. Don't paint when surface temperatures are below 50 degrees or during damp or foggy conditions.

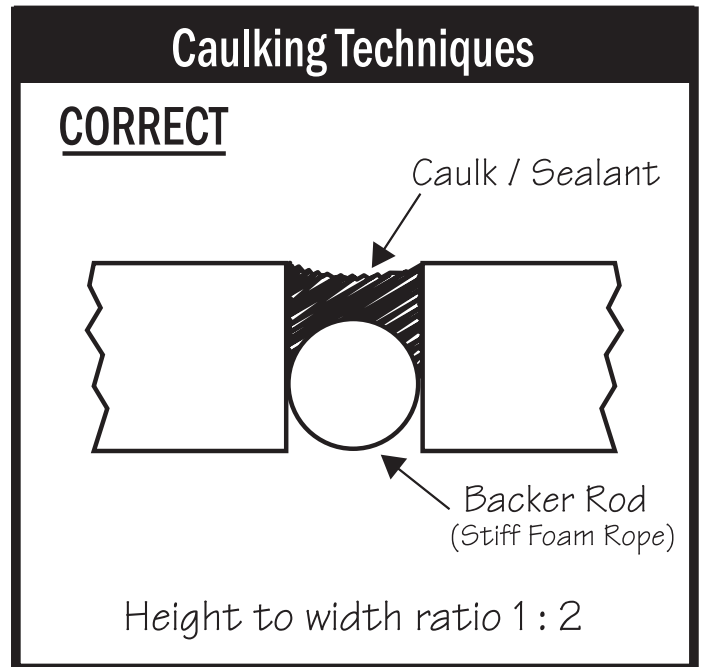
DON'T FORGET THE CAULK

In the process of cleaning and painting your siding you may determine some the caulk needs to be replaced. Use the best caulk / sealant you can afford, not just cheap acrylic caulk. If you will be painting on or around the caulk, consider a caulk that can be painted.

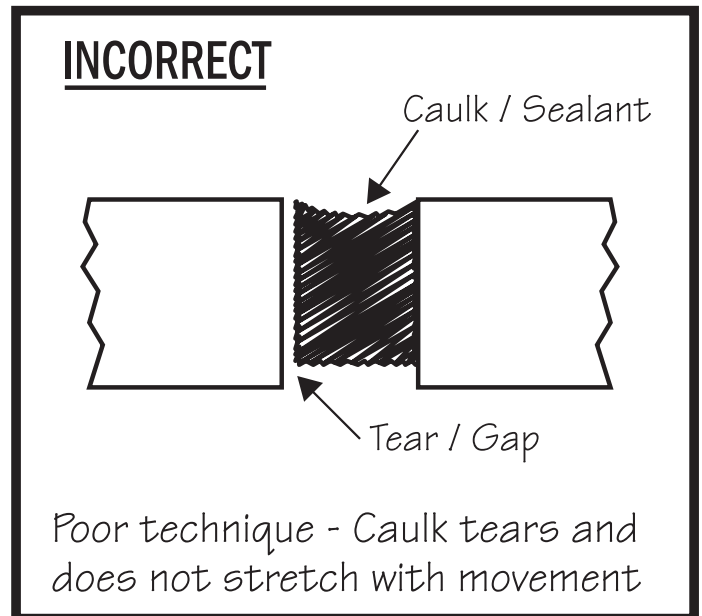
Remember, caulk must stretch and move as housing materials move with temperature and moisture. So caulk the needs to be applied to joints and corners with a thin section that can move and stretch. See Illustration M009 for correct caulking details.

RESTORE THAT SIDING?

Give it a try. Restoration with a good cleaning and a surface treatment can make your home look like new, sometimes without paint. Just don't shortcut the process – cleaning and preparation are vital.



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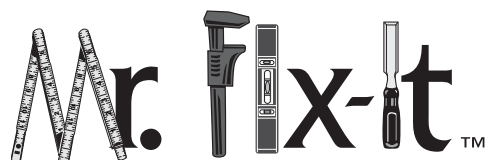
M009

HOME TIPS

Written by Tom Feiza

See Tom's book
[How To Operate Your Home](#)
(ISBN 0-9674759-3-7)
for great information
on "operating" a home.

The book is available at
www.amazon.com or through Tom at:
www.howtooperateyourhome.com
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