

# HOUSE POWER!

# Popular Mechanics

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SPECTACULAR

HOW YOUR WORLD WORKS

## ASK ROY

Skills

## Leaf Stains, Leaks, Storm Doors, and Busted Concrete

Popular Mechanics' senior home editor can fix pretty much anything. Even that.

BY ROY BERENDSOHN



### How can we get rid of the leaf stains on our new deck?

Those stains are caused by tannins leached out of the leaves by rainwater. If the deck is sealed or finished, they'll fade on their own, usually within a couple of weeks. But if the wood is unfinished, you may want to hasten the process with a cleaning. If your deck is built with com-

posite lumber, follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions to avoid surface damage (and voiding your warranty). For example, Trex decking recommends using a cleaner containing oxalic or phosphoric acid. For pressure-treated decking, any jug of cleaner that's rated for decks or fences will work. Next spring do yourself a favor and pressure-wash the deck and apply a stain or sealer. You won't have to deal with this again.

### Last winter the entire surface came off part of our concrete sidewalk. Can it be repaired, or will that part of the sidewalk need to be replaced?

The condition you describe is known as scaling. When water freezes inside the concrete's top surface, the ice crystals can exert a pressure so great that it breaks the surface away.

If the damaged area is an oval, that indicates a puddle formed there. In the trades, this low area is known as a birdbath, and it's a sign of improper concrete finishing. Usually, though, scaling occurs because the concrete was incorrectly formulated at the plant or too much water was added when it was delivered. It's also possible that the concrete's final smoothing occurred in standing water. As concrete is placed and smoothed, its water works up to the surface. If a mason doesn't skim off this moisture or allow it to evaporate, it will work itself into the uppermost layer, creating an improper ratio of cement to water, and a weak top.

There is one more option: It could be your fault. You might have laid on too heavy a layer of

deicer, which weakens the cement paste. Sometimes concrete can be topped with a self-leveling repair material like Quikrete Commercial Grade Concrete Resurfacer. But if the scaling is severe, you're better off replacing the sidewalk.

### My storm door was ripped open by the wind, damaging the doorjamb. How do I fix it, and how do I prevent this from happening again?

Storm doors blow open when their closers are worn out or were not properly installed, so in the course of the repair, you'll want to put in new ones. Maybe even a heavy-duty model with more pulling force.

The toughest fix is the doorjamb itself. If it's badly cracked, you'll have to either replace the entire thing or saw away the damaged section using an oscillating multitool. The replacement pieces need to be planed to thickness and ripped to width. Each piece should be crosscut to make a tight fit, then fastened with exterior-grade wood screws. Finally, sand the entire jamb, prime, and paint it.

Install a safety chain. It may look ugly, but it reduces the likelihood of damage should the door be ripped open by another gust.

### Can I fix a roof leak by caulking from inside the attic?

No. You'll divert the water to another entry point or trap it between the caulk and the bottom of the shingles. Eventually the plywood roof deck will rot. The only solution is to replace the offending shingles or flashing. That usually leads to finding more problems. Brace yourself for a big job.

