

50plus Handyman



Replacing a door?

50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick looks at replacing interior and exterior doors and considers how to avoid the pitfalls.

Changing doors is a fast way a refreshing a dated property but a few words of caution before you take out the old and bring in the new. If your home is Victorian, Edwardian or older take a careful look at what is in place. Just because the doors don't look panelled it doesn't mean that they aren't. The 1960's in particular saw a phase of tacking hardboard over what we now consider fashionable doors and often a careful examination will reveal a door of reasonable quality beneath a dull exterior.

If you do need to replace an internal door then go through a few basic checks before buying:

- Check the door is not a 'fire door'. If it's leading to a garage or to an individual living space in a rental property then it has to meet specific requirements of the Building Regulations to prevent fire and smoke spreading. If this is the case call an expert or talk to building control at your local council who can advise on the requirements for the specific location
- Check the size. Most doors are of a 'standard' size, usually in an imperial measure (inches) and replacements must be of the same size, at least approximately. Remember that you cannot cut more than about an inch off a modern 'hollow' door as the wood around the perimeter only extends for limited distance internally. If you have a non-standard sized door don't worry too much, it's usually possible to reconstruct a standard sized door
- Remember to measure both sides and top and bottom of the door. Many doors will have been cut to fit frames that are not square, particularly in older properties
- It's usually easier to replace the door 'furniture' (the handles, hinges and lock). Not doing so is often a false economy as it can cost more in time to recover the old parts than the cost of the new ones. If the old hinges are reasonable however it can be beneficial to reuse them if replacements are of a different size.

When replacing doors do not remove the old until you have the replacement on site. The old door forms a ready template for cutting the new one to size. Without it the work can take far longer.

Finally remember a new door will need painting. Even if the door comes with a white finish at least two coats of paint will be required. Paint can be rolled onto doors and often rolling leaves a better finish as well as being faster.

How long will the job take? Changing one door is typically a two-hour job excluding painting and assuming the new door is a reasonable fit. The same does not however apply to external doors, so let's take a look at these.

Leaving aside UPVC, external doors are normally solid wood, heavy and take far more time to install not least because cutting to size and fitting furniture in solid wood is a longer job. Aside from the fire door point the checks for internal doors are equally applicable to external ones. It is worth considering investing more in quality exterior furniture; the cheaper finishes will not take the ravages of the British climate for long before deteriorating. Preventing ingress of rain is important so don't forget the weather strip if your current door has one as many suppliers sell these separately.

If the external door needs cutting to size having the supplier do most of the work makes the job far easier. Don't try and get the replacement door to an exact size however; the chances are it will be wrong. Careful use of the old door coupled with measurement on site is key as external door can be very draughty if ill fitting.

Finally the finish on external doors must be undertaken carefully. Entrance doors impact both the value and how saleable your property is so a good and lasting finish is important.

Roger Runswick is a director of 50plus Handyman and a member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. He can be contacted at roger.runswick@the50plus.co.uk.