

Asphalt Shingle Roofs Are Repairable: What You Need to Know

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Asphalt shingles are the most widely chosen steep-slope roof covering in North America. One of the reasons asphalt shingles are a great choice for steep-slope roofing is that they are easy to repair if they become damaged due to unforeseen circumstances, such as impact from windborne debris. Asphalt shingles are installed as part of a system designed to shed water during severe weather, such as heavy rain, high winds, and extreme temperatures. The inherent robustness of the installed system, combined with easy repairability, provides property owners with a resilient roofing system that will perform for a long time.

What Makes Asphalt Shingles Easy to Repair

An asphalt shingle roofing system is comprised of different components, including underlayment, starters, asphalt shingles, and hip and ridge caps. Although these components work together to protect a building, what makes an asphalt shingle roof easy to repair is that most components can be repaired independently, and you don't have to disrupt a large area of the roof to make a repair. Asphalt shingles can be carefully separated even once they are sealed, which makes their repair/replacement with new shingles much easier and faster than is the case with other roofing materials.

The ability to make a repair quickly and effectively can be important when you need to protect against further damage or water intrusion. A qualified professional roofing contractor, knowledgeable about the proper installation and repair of asphalt shingles, can make small repairs in a short period of time with materials that are readily available. Repairs that can be done relatively quickly include: installing proper flashing around new roof penetrations, replacing shingles that have been damaged or punctured by windborne debris, resealing shingles that have been damaged by high winds, and repairing incorrectly seated or backed-out fasteners.

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Aesthetic Considerations for Roof Repairs

Because asphalt shingle roofing systems are generally visible from the ground, making a repair should include using materials that best match the asphalt shingles that are already in place on the roof. One of the best ways to do this is to use asphalt shingles that were saved and stored when the roof was installed. Generally, contractors will leave property owners with extra shingles for this purpose. If there are no retained shingles available, knowing the color name and the year your roof was installed can be very helpful for a contractor to best match your shingles with a commercially available product.

While asphalt shingle color blends change over time, roofing manufacturers are a great resource for understanding which products today have similar color blends to products/colors that may no longer be available. If you do not know the brand or manufacturer of the asphalt shingles on a roof, a local roofing contractor or distributor is often a good source of help for identifying shingles both by type and color and can provide guidance with finding a good aesthetic match for making repairs. One thing to keep in mind is that a repair that requires the installation of new shingles, even with matching shingles, may be aesthetically different initially because the newly installed material has not aged the same as the existing roof. This difference in appearance will generally become less apparent over time as the repair material ages on the roof.

Repairing Asphalt Shingle Roofs

Asphalt shingle roofs are comprised of rows of overlapping shingles that are installed over an underlayment. Individual shingles are fastened with several roofing nails per shingle to a solid deck beneath the underlayment. Once installed, asphalt shingles typically adhere to each other to provide wind resistance for the roofing system. Since sealed shingles can be manually separated/unsealed, making a repair that requires working under the overlap of installed shingles is possible and allows for disruption of a small area of the roof. For example, if a fastener is backing out of the roof deck, unsealing the shingle that is directly upslope will allow for a quick removal of the fastener and then replacement with a new fastener in an adjacent

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location. After the new fastener is in place, the upslope shingle can be hand sealed in place to ensure it will properly adhere to the shingle below.

While asphalt shingle roofs are generally considered “easily repairable,” roofing repairs should be done by a qualified roofing professional. A roofing professional will have the experience and expertise necessary to avoid damaging the adjacent shingles and/or flashings, the proper safety equipment to work on a sloped roof, and the necessary tools and materials to make a proper repair.

Mistakes to Avoid

Failing to minimize interior water damage. Because damage can happen to any roofing system that prevents it from performing as intended, the first thing that should be done is to minimize the effects of water entry prior to attempting repairs. The use of buckets or other means to collect water and divert it from further damaging the interior, including insulation and ceilings, can be effective. The use of a tarp on the exterior damaged roof area may be an alternative for preventing further water entry. These preventative measures are often overlooked in an emergency yet can significantly reduce the amount of damage that occurs.

Mistaking temporary fixes for long-term repairs. A roofing professional may have to undertake temporary repairs, which are often necessary to stop water entry, while the proper materials are sourced to make a permanent repair. As an example, using compatible roofing cement may work as a temporary repair for a puncture through a roofing shingle but should not be considered a suitable long-term repair.

Neglecting Routine Maintenance. Just like other components of your home require maintenance, your roofing system benefits from routine preventive maintenance to keep it performing properly. Cleaning gutters and downspouts, keeping trees trimmed and branches/debris off the roof surface, and replacing damaged or missing caulk are examples of routine maintenance. In addition, a routine inspection of your roof should be done by a qualified professional roofing contractor knowledgeable about the proper installation and

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repair of asphalt shingles to help prevent damage during severe weather. Typically, an inspection is done in the spring so that repairs can be made during the warmer months, and then another inspection is performed in the fall prior to severe winter weather.

Using “Too Good To Be True” Fixes. There are many products marketed to homeowners that may or may not benefit your roofing system. It is always good practice to consult the manufacturer of your roofing shingles prior to having a coating or resaturant or “rejuvenator” material installed over your shingles that may be incompatible with your asphalt shingles and may harm your roofing system’s ability to perform. For specific recommendations, refer to ARMA’s technical bulletin titled “Application of Coatings, Rejuvenators, or Cleaning Materials on Asphalt Shingles After Installation.”

Asphalt shingle roofing systems perform very well at protecting against the intrusion of water and, in the event of damage, can often be readily repaired. Asphalt shingles are the most widely installed steep-slope roof covering in North America; they are readily available, and many contractors are familiar with their proper installation. Understanding these key attributes helps homeowners realize why choosing an asphalt shingle roofing system is a sound decision for their roofing needs.

WARNING: Because it is dangerous to walk, climb or work on a roof, ARMA recommends that only trained professionals engage in such activity. If you choose to do so, exercise extreme care, comply with all government safety regulations, and follow all safety work practices, precautions and procedures, including but not limited to manufacturer’s instructions, labels, and warnings.

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