



5 Tips for Inspecting and Maintaining Your Garage

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Routine maintenance will help your garage retain its value and keep it trouble-free for decades.

If you're like many homeowners, you cruise in and out of your garage without giving the space much thought. While your garage is low-maintenance, it's not a no-maintenance part of your home. Here are five tips for preserving your home's value by keeping your garage in top shape.

1. Keep your garage door running smoothly

Most newer garage doors

(<http://www.houselogic.com/articles/garage-doors-guide-options/>) come self-lubricated or with plastic parts that need no oil, according to builder Fred Cann, owner of JRS Solutions in Melville, N.Y. You'll need to annually oil older doors with metal rollers, hinges, and tracks.

"Use a leaf blower to blast all the grit, grime, dust, cobwebs, and dead bugs from the door's parts," advises Mark Secord, brand manager for PremierGarage in Mobile, Ala.

Occasionally check the rubber seal on the bottom of your garage door. It can harden or chip away from wear and tear, allowing the elements to seep under your door. Replacing the seal costs less than \$100. Your door may be hitting the ground too forcefully and jarring all the parts, crushing the rubber seal, or allowing light to peek through at the bottom when the door is at rest. To correct those problems, says Secord, use a screwdriver to alter the travel limit adjustment located on the door opener's control box.

Regularly test the garage door's sensors to be sure they still prevent it from closing if

something-like your child or pet-is in the way.

2. Clean your garage floor

Hose down your garage floor annually to prevent slip hazards, stains, and pockmarks caused by road salt and auto fluids, recommends Secord. You may notice hairline cracks in your concrete slab, but those are generally no cause for concern, says Paul Fisher, owner of Danley's Garage World in Chicago.

If there's a serious trip hazard because of concrete that's crumbled or separated $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch or more, take action. You can try a do-it-yourself patch with a \$5 concrete mix from your local hardware store. But patched concrete often doesn't adhere to the original slab, says Fisher, especially if a car regularly passes over the patched area. If necessary, ask a licensed concrete contractor for an estimate on replacing your slab, which typically costs about \$5 per square foot.

Experts disagree on whether to treat a garage slab with a sealant. "Sealants don't protect the slab at all; they're just for aesthetics," says Cann, who worked as an engineer for the city of New York for 10 years. "We had more problems after we sealed and painted garage slabs. The paint would chip, discolor, or become slippery. I'd leave concrete alone."

Secord, however, sells garage floor sealants and says they protect the concrete, prevent discoloration, and are easier to clean than bare concrete. Do-it-yourself sealants for an average two-car garage cost about \$800 to \$1,200 and need reapplication every three to five years. One-time, professional applications cost \$1,500 to \$2,000, says Secord.

3. Monitor your garage walls and foundation

Inspect interior and exterior walls and the foundation twice a year for moisture and cracks. If you see discoloration or mold, moisture is seeping in from the roof or the walls. Call a building or roofing contractor for an inspection and repair estimates.

Wall and foundation cracks smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch wide that aren't causing water damage are typically harmless. "Anything larger than a hairline crack is something to be concerned about," says Cann. "If one side of your ceiling appears a little lower than the other, the foundation or footing has settled." That's sometimes hard to evaluate with a visual inspection; if necessary, get out your level.

Structural concerns

(<http://www.houselogic.com/articles/understanding-foundation-problems/>) require an expert evaluation. Cann suggests hiring a structural engineer, who will charge \$200 to \$300 per hour but won't hype potential problems to secure the repair work.

4. Clean interior doors and gutters

Once a year, clean and inspect the interior door. Make sure the door is properly weatherstripped and that the threshold seal fits snugly against the bottom of the door.

Most building codes require the door allowing entry to your home to be fire-rated and self-closing. If the door is damaged or the self-closing mechanism has failed, repair or replace it. You'll pay \$250 to \$300 for a new fire-rated door, plus \$25 to \$75 for installation.

If your garage has gutters

(<http://www.houselogic.com/articles/fast-fixes-common-gutter-problems/>), clean them every spring and fall and inspect them for damage. While you're at it, check your roof for damaged or missing shingles or tiles.

5. Watch for pest invasions

Insects like termites and carpenter ants can furtively damage your garage walls. Inspect dark, cool, and moist spots, especially where garage walls meet the foundation, for borings from carpenter ants or termites. "Termites digest the lumber, but carpenter ants tunnel it," says Cann. "If you see trails of sawdust, it's carpenter ants. If you see chewed wood, it'll likely be termites." Call in pest-control experts for an inspection and treatment.

G.M. Filisko is an attorney and award-winning writer who oversaw the renovation of her condo association's five-space garage so a sixth space could be added for her. A frequent contributor to many national publications including Bankrate.com, REALTOR® Magazine, and the American Bar Association Journal, she specializes in real estate, business, personal finance, and legal topics.