

Easy fixes for a saggy door

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Q: Our front door faces the southwest and has a short overhang such that it takes a beating from the afternoon sun. We replaced our 36-by-80-inch wood-panel front door with a new fiberglass one.

It has settled over the past 15 months. Also, it's sagging a bit. The old wood door sagged because of the many separate pieces that sagged. The new fiberglass door has a solid one-piece face, but the top corner is sagging just a bit so that it rubs against the jamb.

I assume it's simply because of the weight of the door, settling over time and the expansion from warmer weather. The door uses hefty 5-by-5-inch hinges; the screws are tight; and they're not pulling out of the jambs. Being fiberglass, the door can't be planed easily.

Do you have any suggestions on how to "lift" the door back up so that it doesn't rub?

A: Houses settle and doors bind. It's an unfortunate fact of a homeowner's life. We have mentioned that the front corner of Kevin's house moves with the seasons. Changes in ground moisture are the reason. The front corner is also home to the front door. So far, Kevin's front door doesn't bind, but it is a little gappy on the upper side opposite the hinges. It does sag a bit.

Luckily, there are a couple of easy fixes for a saggy door other than the work-intensive measure of removing the door, jamb and all, and re-hanging it. One involves using stouter fasteners, the other shims.

First, look at the door in the opening. Based on the information you've given in your question, the gap at the top of the door is uneven. It's wider on the lockset side than on the hinge side. The goal is to coax the door back to square in the opening.

Heavy entry doors usually have three hinges. Five-inch hinges are beefier than the standard 3- or 4-inch butt hinges and indicate a heavier door.

The easiest potential fix is to replace the short screws fastening the top hinge to the jamb with longer screws that go through the jamb and into the studs framing the door opening. The 2-by-4 or 2-by-6 framing is nailed to horizontal plates top and bottom. In addition, there is a horizontal header over the opening. The header picks up the load of the wall and prevents the stud from moving toward the opening. Securing the top hinge by driving 3-inch screws through the jamb into the frame may right the door in the frame.

If that doesn't work, leave the long screws in and go to the next step -- shim the hinges. Yes, you heard right, shim the hinges. The goal is to move the bottom of the door slightly away from the hinge-side jamb so that the top gap narrows on the lockset side of the jamb.

Open the door so there is full access to the screws in the hinges. Wedge the bottom of the door to the floor on the lockset side so that the force of the weight of the door on the hinges is relieved. Loosen the screws holding the middle hinge. Remove the bottom hinge from the door and the doorjamb. Using the hinge as a template, cut cardboard shims the size of the hinge on the jamb side with a sharp utility knife. The cardboard should be no thicker than that of the back of a writing tablet. Make between eight and 12 shims.

With the shims in hand, reinstall the hinge on the door. Place three shims into the mortise on the jamb and screw the hinge through the cardboard into the jamb. Close the door to see if the rubbing is cured. Add or remove shims until the space at the top of the door is consistent.

Once the space at the top looks good, shim the middle hinge. Since the middle hinge is halfway up the door, use half the number of shims you used for the bottom hinge. This supports the middle hinge.

There you have it, a couple of tricks to try to right a wayward door. They usually work and we're confident one or both will work for you. If they don't, the next step is to remove and re-hang the door. That's a lot of work.