

Tips for repairing driveways and paths

Your home's driveway and pathways can create a great first impression. They can also crack, and change the whole look and feel of your house.

Whether you're seeing big or little cracks in your concrete, this article contains handy tips for assessing the severity of concrete cracking, and offers some best-practice fixes to get your driveway and paths looking great.

Causes and culprits of concrete cracks

Tree roots, water erosion, impacts and overloads can all cause your driveways and paths to have a crack-up. But the most common culprit is the humble puddle.

Standing water can seep into porous concrete, then contract and expand with temperature variations. This is more critical in regions that experience freezing conditions, but even in moderate climates your driveways and paths are outside in the elements 24/7.

Over time, tiny movements in the concrete can result in almost-undetectable hairline cracks that can quickly turn into bigger cracks – and even bigger headaches.

Assessing the severity of concrete cracking

Most cracks start small. If you get them early enough, at 3mm wide or less, then it's usually a quick and easy fix. As time goes by, repairs can get more involved – leave it too long and you can be looking over a not-so-Grand Canyon.

The length doesn't matter so much; the width and depth are of more interest. A width of more than a centimetre or so means some serious concrete cutting may be necessary.

If the crack is wide enough, poke a ruler down to figure out its depth. If you drop the ruler and it disappears, step back! You're in bigger trouble than you thought!

Best-practice tips for fixing concrete cracks

Talk to your hardware store about your cracks; they should know the crack filler that best suits your needs. Before starting work, always begin by cleaning the area and removing any plant matter and dirt. If wet, you should wait until it's dry.

And, of course, if you're unsure about anything, call in a concrete expert or builder; poking around

might only make the problem worse.

Small cracks

For a crack under 13mm wide, remove any plant matter and thoroughly clean the crack's edges with a wire brush, removing the debris. Next, apply a good concrete crack filler. Wipe off excess filler with a damp cloth, leaving a little filler above the path's surface, as it will shrink a bit when it's dry.

Bigger cracks

For cracks over 13mm wide, weed, then chisel the sides to a 'V' shape, and clean. If the crack is deeper than 13mm, weed, chisel and clean as above, then fill it with sand to 13mm from the surface. Next, apply a layer of filler so the crack is half full, compressing with a trowel, and allow that layer to dry before applying another. As with small cracks, wipe off any excess filler.

Huge cracks

Unless you're experienced enough to don a mask and use a diamond-blade power saw, cracks of over a few centimetres are best left to the professionals. Your mobile phone is the only tool you'll need; call in the experts.

Looking after your driveway to prevent cracks

It's important to reduce or eliminate the cause of the problem to stop it re-occurring. Look at removing tree roots and applying a good water sealant.

Keep in mind, though, that if the concrete was laid poorly in the first place, cracks are likely to be a permanent problem. If that describes your situation, you should think about ripping it all up and starting afresh.

Keeping your concrete in good repair is great for looks, and it also makes your property safer. When it's a driveway or a path to your front door, smooth, quality concrete makes a good first impression for visitors and potential purchasers.