

## *Up on the Roof*

# Even High Roofs are Low Maintenance

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The good news is that once your roof is installed — I'm assuming by a qualified roofer, not your accountant brother-in-law every-other weekend — it will be easy to maintain.

But it does require maintenance: just an hour or so a year and perhaps a few dollars. That time and money can save you a great deal of money and the stress of a damaged roof. One of the worse homeowner feelings is a leaky roof; still worse is a leaky, recently replaced roof.

First, be careful: Use a quality extension ladder, angled properly, and extend it three feet above the roof surface. And wear shoes that provide good traction, such as tennis shoes.

Let's look at roofs by type.

### **Flat Roofs**

These are also called built-up roofs in the business, and at one time they meant headaches for Valley homeowners, as the materials used to seal them, for the most part asphalt, would easily crack from the summer heat, causing rifts and, ultimately, leaks. Before you climb the ladder, check for any leaks in the eaves (the underside of the roof from the ground): You might see a hole and rotting at the worst case or staining if problems are just beginning. This won't necessarily tell you that the damage is immediately above this area (water is insidious that way), but it will tell you repairs need to be made. I recommend calling a professional, but you can do the repairs yourself, if you are committed to doing them correctly.

Although they lack traditional pitch, flat roofs are canted for drainage, usually toward scuppers on the outside walls. At least once a year, you should get up on the roof and clean away any debris that might have accumulated — leaves, twigs, trash, bird droppings, even dead birds. Just a small amount of this debris can impede drainage and retain moisture. This, in turn, causes cracks and compromises the entire system. Also clean the gutters and downspouts, if you have them.

And, while you're there, check all of the seals around the vents and pipes and turbines — wherever metal contacts the roof or the walls. To reseal this, Home Depot or Lowe's sells rubberized mastic made specifically for these areas. The mastic is applied with a standard tube gun and is designed to never completely dry, thereby retaining its pliability through our varying temperatures. Still, these reseals should also, of course, be checked yearly.

Finally, the newer foam roofs need to be recoated every five to seven years — by a professional or by you. The foam roofs are doing quite well holding up to the desert sun, but even the best of the coatings (many of them the light-reflecting "white" coatings you've heard about) need to be redone on this five-year cycle. For a foam roof, the foam is applied first, then the coating, so if you fail to recoat, you'll risk damaging the foam underneath. At that point, you've threatened the integrity of the roof itself and are inviting the monsoon inside for a visit.

You can patch areas if you notice a breach. Lowe's and Home Depot carry all of the materials, but, as with all compromised areas, get to it quickly, buy good-quality materials, and take your time repairing the area, making sure that you completely clean the area before patching, that you don't trap moisture in the patch, and that you tightly integrate the fixed area to the undamaged roof area around it.

## **Shingles**

Many of the homes in Mesa and some in Gilbert have shingle roofs. As manufacturing has improved in the past few years, correctly installed, a shingle roof should last 15 to 20 years — with proper maintenance.

Good single-roof maintenance begins, as with flats, on the ground. Check the eaves for staining and damage. The more you see, the more you need to investigate up top.

Check the shingles to make sure all are adhered correctly. If the shingle looks loose along the adhesion strip (the sticky side designed to adhere with the sun's heat to the shingle below), gently lift the area up, place some mastic along the strip and press for a reseal.

Again, check for debris, especially along the roof valleys: These are the areas where two pitched areas meet. Here is where most of the water during a storm runs off. It is also where much of the debris sits, so valleys need to be cleaned at least once a year (especially in the fall because of the leaves).

And, do not apply a coating to shingles. You will see ads for this material and you may have people come to your door to sell you the product and the service, but respectfully say no. This "added protection" can actually impede drainage.

## **Shake**

Shake roofs are not very common any longer, although there are homes in every Valley community with them. These homes use cedar wood shingles (shakes) to protect the 30-pound underlayment, which actually waterproofs the roof. In California, they are no longer allowed because of the fire danger: Fires easily skip from one shake roof to the next, like matchsticks. You can have a fire retardant applied, which probably has some effectiveness. And, you can have linseed oil applied, which, again, I think, is of limited effectiveness because of the desiccating effect of our desert sun.

The most important rule here is, once again, to keep the roof and gutters clear of debris and to regularly check the condition and stability of the shakes. Missing shakes should be replaced.

## **Tile**

The single most important element in maintaining a tile roof is to clear debris. Failure to do so will create a damming effect that will compromise the integrity of the underlayment, or tar paper, that protects the plywood sheathing. Look for accumulations of bird droppings. Pigeons can make a mess: I know, as I've cleaned piles of excrement blocking drainage.

Finally, look for broken tiles (walk carefully). Carefully remove and replace the broken tiles. If you find broken tile, you can take a sample to a local roofing distributor, who can help you get replacements.

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*Knudson owns Roofstar, an East Valley-based company.*