

How To Tune Up Your Garage Door

By Chuck Howard

An often ignored aspect of home maintenance – ignored until something in the range of annoying to disastrous happens, that is – is keeping your garage door adjusted and in good repair. If you've ever been plagued by a quirky garage door opener, or a door that sounds like fingernails on a blackboard when it opens, or simply stood in the rain facing what used to be a welcoming portal but is now an immovable object you'll understand the importance of taking care of what is for most people the primary entrance to their home.

How you maintain your door begins with what it's made of.... metal doors require different maintenance than wooden doors, for example. All doors should be kept clean, rinsing them off with a hose and mild detergent is preferable, and some manufacturers recommend "waxing" pre-finished doors with a car wax once or twice a year to protect the paint or varnish from UV rays and minerals and chemicals found in rain water as well – it's best to try this on the inside of the door in an unnoticeable place if you have any doubts about how this will look – for example, wax is probably not a good idea on flat finish paint.

Second, you should regularly, at least once every couple of months, check out all of the various connections holding the pieces of the door together, the weather stripping around the door, the hinges, rollers, springs, tracks and other components to make sure they're tight, clean, lubricated and in good shape. Lack of lubrication is one of the prime causes for stiff and noisy garage doors and for the failure of garage door openers. Depending upon what parts are made of, your garage door manufacturer may recommend special lubricants and for heavy duty metal components like tracks and springs, 10W30 motor oil – the same kind you put in your car – is often specified. If in doubt, check with the manufacturer, as some oil-based lubricants may actually damage or weaken rubber components.

If you have an electric garage door opener, disable it occasionally and open your garage door manually – is it difficult to open, does it "hang" or go out of balance? If so, your garage door opener is also feeling that additional strain and may fail. If the problem is serious, have a professional installer look at it.

Painted garage doors need the same kind of care you give to the other painted wood parts of the house. Layer upon layer of paint not only adds weight to the door, but can interfere with the operation of the hinges. When you paint your door, remove excess paint, sand down rough spots and in general have a smooth clean surface before you apply more paint. The same goes doors

that are varnished or stained with a natural finish – and remember, nothing looks worse when you're trying to sell your house than a scruffy garage door, no matter how beautifully cared for the rest of the home.

If you have an electric garage door opener, you should also check and adjust it and any safety features at least monthly. Your garage door should close firmly and completely – check your garage door opener manual for information on how to adjust the door. The door should also reverse instantly if it encounters an object no matter where it is in the process of closing – check and adjust the auto reversal controls and photo-electric sensors if any. If these do not appear to be working properly and you can't adjust them, call a repair person or have the opener replaced immediately.

Finally, check and lubricate any handles or locks for manual operation, you never know when you may need to manually operate the door, and most people become so used to automatic operation that they forget that if there's a power outage or other problem with the opener, they may still want to get their car out of the garage. Also, just like a smoke alarm, remember to change the batteries in your opener and the light bulb on the base unit yearly, and clean and dust the opener unit thoroughly – most garage door opener motors are sealed and require no further lubrication from you.