

Caulk This Way

Some simple tricks for sealing cracks

Like a coat with a broken zipper, a home with air leaks doesn't do a very good job of keeping out the elements. Even a few small gaps and cracks can keep the building from operating at its maximum level of energy-efficiency. They also give insects and mice easy access into your home. Fortunately, you can seal those gaps and cracks inexpensively by using caulk. Here are some tips to help you get the best possible results when caulking around the home.

Selection

These days you can find caulk for a wide range of applications. Acrylic latex caulk is good for general uses, both indoors and out. It's also easy to clean up if you make a mistake. Silicone caulk is more challenging to use, but makes a better choice for sealing slick surfaces like tile, glass, and metal. Check the manufacturer's recommendations on the label to make sure you're buying the right sealant for the job.

Preparation

Caulk is packaged in sealed tubes. You may find embossed markings along the nozzle; these markings correspond to different bead sizes, which you can match to the joint you'll be filling. To open the tube, snip the tip of the



nozzle, cutting approximately at a 45-degree angle, and then break the interior seal with a nail or other sharp object. Many caulk guns come equipped with handy extras, such as tip cutters and seal piercers, to make opening the tube even easier.

Application

While there's no exact science to caulking (and no real art to it either), in time you'll develop a feel for the consistency of the material and the tension in the caulk gun. To ensure that the caulk adheres properly, you should clean the area first, removing any old caulk left over from previous applications. Hold the nozzle at a 45-degree angle to the joint and position the tip so the caulk adheres to both surfaces. Pull, don't push, the gun along the seam, applying the caulk two to three feet at a time. For a clean look, apply the caulk in a

single, unbroken bead whenever possible. Caulk is much more difficult to remove after it has dried, so keep several rags handy to clean up mistakes as soon as they happen.

Finishing

After you've drawn a bead along the joint, you'll want to finesse the caulk into the seam. This process, known as "tooling," helps the caulk adhere to the surface while removing any rough patches in the bead. Press the caulk into the joint by running a moistened finger, paintbrush handle, or other object along the surface. Because your work will likely improve as you go along, it's best to start with the least noticeable cracks and work up to the more prominent ones.

For more information or product recommendations, check with your local home improvement store.

