

One Small Step for Man, One Giant Leap Over the Hole in Your Driveway

Does this sound familiar? You're driving your car when BAM! You hit a post-winter crater that makes the Grand Canyon seem like hole #7 at the local mini-golf course. But you can't decide where to aim your frustration – at the possible damage to your tire or at the fact that you haven't even left your driveway yet!

Most driveway damage is caused by normal seasonal wear. As precipitation covers and saturates your driveway, the repetitive freezing and thawing throughout the winter months causes cracks to expand and the foundation to weaken. This month is a good time to start thinking about repair or replacement options and getting estimates, because the paving season begins in mid-April.

Driveways are commonly made of asphalt or concrete. Concrete driveways are 3-4 times more expensive to replace than asphalt and repair is not usually an option. In fact, some home owners choose to pave over their concrete driveways because asphalt lasts longer is impervious to erosion from rock-salt snow and ice melt quicker on it and, of course, it's much cheaper. In fact, many residential driveway contractors are primarily asphalt pavers.

Seal-coating your driveway is one preventative measure you can and should do yourself, says Sam Mangieri, co-owner of M & D Paving. "When your driveway loses its black luster and starts looking grey, it's time to seal-coat." With an investment of some brushes, sealing materials and old shoes you're willing to ruin, you can keep your driveway looking great and protect it at the same time.

Driveways that have been installed correctly usually have a lifespan of 10-15 years. But if your driveway is getting on in years and has more serious problems than fading, it may be time for a face-lift or even an extreme makeover. Mangieri notes, "Minor cracks and wear can be fixed with a resurfacing process that is usually half the cost of repaving."

However, major cracks, signs of crumbling, buckling, sinking or visible mud means your driveway probably needs to be repaved. This process consists of ripping out your old driveway, discarding it and replacing the foundation, binder and top-coat. Some contractors can even recycle some of your old driveway into the new one, depending on the material.

Most paving companies offer free estimates. Required work and costs vary and will be determined by the condition, type and slope of your driveway, as well as the ground underneath. Costs range from \$1,500 to \$5,000.

Steve Collins, owner of the Collins Paving Company, has been in the business nearly 25 years. "Be careful," he warns, "lots of new companies have popped up the last several years."

Your best bet is to contact a few contractors for estimates, ask for referrals and see other projects they have done. Also talk to their previous customers and check the Better Business Bureau.

It's also important to know what you are getting. Says Collins, "Multiple layers and



compaction are important for a solid driveway. We start with a 6-inch stone base, add 2 inches of binder and then finish with 1.5 inches of top-coat. You should also ask how deep the asphalt base and top-coat will be after it is compacted. About 1-2 inches each is good."

Most pavers operate mid-April until late November, weather permitting. Note that some townships require permits, especially if you are paving up to a city street or over a curb. Make sure that your contractor is aware of any legal ramifications because the home-owner is ultimately responsible for any possible fines.

This spring, stop being referred to as the Neil Armstrong of driveways and fix those craters! For free estimates, contact the Collins Paving Company at 412-366-6655 or M & D Paving at 412-369-6821. ❖



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