

# DIY FIX FOR TROUBLESOME DOORS THAT SWELL IN SUMMER

Summer is the time of year when wooden doors give trouble, and humid weather is the reason why. Many consecutive days of high humidity causes the wood to absorb moisture and swell, making doors larger than they are during dry, winter months. And though you may be able to find a handyman to travel to your home and fix this minor trouble at a reasonable price, it's not likely. The job is just too small, and that's why it makes sense to learn to make doors work well on your own.

## LOOK FOR WEAR

*“ If your door rubs along the bottom, drag a pencil along the floor to mark a line where the door needs to be cut. ”*

Start by looking at the edges of the door for signs they're rubbing against the surrounding frame, then whittle down these areas using a hand plane or electric power planer. Always work inwards from a corner, to avoid splintering the wood. Many times you don't even need to remove the door to complete planing operations. If your door rubs along the bottom, drag a pencil along the floor to mark a line where the door needs to be cut. This is the same procedure for marking and cutting a door when floor height has



*Dragging a pencil horizontally across the floor automatically creates a line on the door that's slightly above the floor. This is called scribing. Cut an oversized door along this line and it'll have just the right amount of clearance. The scribing operation shown here is to make allowances for a new finished floor.*

*Photo credit: Steve Maxwell*

been raised because new flooring was installed. To prevent splintering of the door face, place masking tape over the area of the door that will be cut, then use a jigsaw with a fine blade to remove excess wood.

## HINGES CAN HELP

If a door binds with the floor only as it opens, perhaps against a carpet or broadloom, consider something called rising butt hinges. They automatically lift the door as it swings open, eliminating the need to create a large gap underneath the door. Rising butt hinges aren't easy to find, and they're not cheap, but they do work. One mail order source I know of is Constantines ([www.constantines.com](http://www.constantines.com); 1-800-443-9667).

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### DOORS THAT STAY PUT

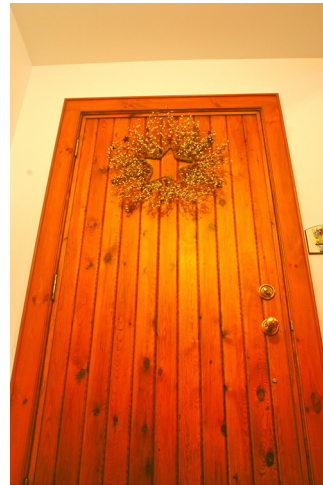
Does your door swing open on its own? That's a sign that the hinges aren't in vertical alignment. If hinge pins can be removed (not all types can), have someone hold the door open, then tap the pins up and out using a large nail and gentle hammer blows. Place the hinge pins on a flat rock or concrete floor, then hit the pin in the middle with a hammer to put a slight bend in it. Reinstall pins and the added friction may keep the door where it's put. If not, relocate the hinges into vertical alignment using a 48-inch carpenter's level for reference.

*“ Never fixed a door before? No worries. Give it a try and see how most anyone can succeed. ”*

### OILING AND LATCH ADJUSTMENTS

Squeaky hinges are easy to fix. Drip light oil on swiveling parts, opening and closing the door to work it in. Wipe excess oil off with a rag and they'll continue to operate smoothly for a year or more on a single oiling. Are hinge screws loose and won't tighten no matter how much you turn them? Remove the screws one at a time, then stuff round toothpicks and wood glue into the holes. Let the glue dry for a day, then re-drive the screws. You'll be amazed how well they tighten up in the new wood.

Doors fail to latch shut when the metal strike plate isn't positioned correctly to engage the door latch. Look closely around the



Wooden doors are especially prone to binding and trouble at this time of the year. A summer's worth of humid weather has swollen them to maximum size. Fixing a binding door now means it'll probably function bind-free all year long.

Photo credit:  
Steve Maxwell

gap around the frame where the latch is, to see exactly what's holding the latch back. If the misalignment is small (and it usually is), a round file can solve the problem quickly. The working face of modern strike plates can also be adjusted with a flat screwdriver, used as a lever to bend the metal and tweak the latch engagement point so the door clicks shut nicely. Look for a small slot near the working surface of the latch. This is where the screwdriver goes for adjustment.

Never fixed a door before? No worries. Give it a try and see how most anyone can succeed.

Steve Maxwell, syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist, has shared his DIY tips, how-to videos and product reviews since 1988. Follow "Canada's Handiest Man" at [SteveMaxwell.ca](http://SteveMaxwell.ca), Facebook or @Maxwells\_Tips on Twitter.

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