



THE DIY GUIDE TO SCREEN AND STORM DOORS

Because we're always moving through and pushing against screen doors, they're likely candidates for rips, tears and punctures. But anyone can repair screen doors (or window screens). And in just five minutes or less, you can adjust your screen or storm door so that it closes quietly, yet tightly. You simply need to know one trick to setting the piston that pulls the door shut. Plus — a special bonus — various types of doorstops and how to use them to prevent unnecessary damage to walls.

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HOW TO REPAIR SCREENS

Fixing rips and tears in window screens and screen doors is easy and requires only a few simple tools.

A well-mounted screen door pleasantly ventilates your living space and keeps out the bugs. It closes smoothly without catching anywhere on the jamb (the frame around the door), into which it fits perfectly with no bug-sized gaps. The screening should be tight as a drumhead, but that's where problems usually start, because screen material is fragile.

Eventually a rip will appear, or even a large hole. Whether the damage was caused by children at play, enthusiastic dogs, cats playing Spider-Man or an adult accidentally poking a hole with a tool handle, it must be fixed. Flies and other insects know exactly how to find a hole in a screen, and they tell all their friends. Furthermore, any break in a screen invites curious fingers to probe it, so the rip or hole will quickly grow in size.

If you can't tackle the job right away, put a wide piece of clear tape over both

sides of the hole. It can be done without dismounting the door and takes less than a minute. This only postpones the job, but it will buy you some time.

There are two basic types of screen doors—sliding and hinged. But there are variations: wood, aluminum and different sizes. Make a note of what type of door you have, and take measurements before you leave for the hardware store.

Next, get ready for the repair. There are two ways to approach this task:

1. slowly and carefully or
2. slapdash and fast.

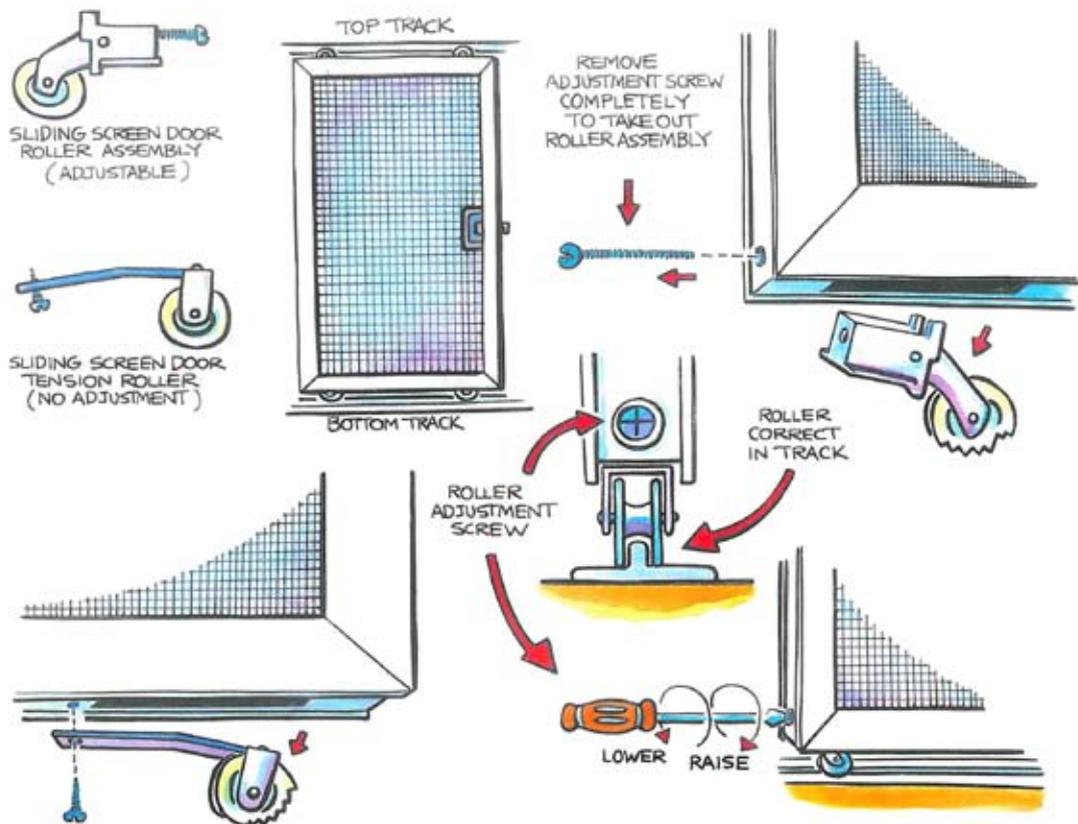
Choose No. 1. Set aside a large block of uninterrupted time and make a preliminary list of tools and materials: scissors, utility knife, thread, replacement screen and a screen-door tool called a "roller." Keep the list handy, because you may be adding to it. For instance, you won't know if the spline (the rubber gasket that secures the screen to the

frame) needs replacing until you remove it. And you may need some replacement screws if any of the old ones are discombobulated or missing.

Hinged Screen Doors

When you're ready for a more permanent repair, it's always best and easiest to take the door off. It's much safer than working in a narrow, awkward space between two freely swinging doors where it's surprisingly easy to pinch fingers. Slowly and carefully, place the door flat on two sawhorses. Make sure your work area has enough room to walk completely around the door. A large covered porch is ideal, offering shade on a hot day and protection in all weather.

Unscrew the hinges from the jamb, leaving the hinges on the screen door. Fold them flat so they're out of the way. The spring or automatic closer should be removed from the door and left at-



Cleaning, oiling and adjusting rollers helps sliding screen doors function smoothly.

tached at the jamb. Keep screw-pulou track of all screws, or you'll regret it later.

Examine the damaged area of the screen. A small rip can be sewn shut with a needle and thread. To fix a gaping hole, cut a circle around the damage and remove that portion of the screen. Then, with a needle and thread, sew in a round patch of screen about 2 inches larger than the hole. Put it on the side that faces outside.

If the entire screen must be replaced, carefully remove the old rubber or vinyl spline from the groove, starting at a corner. If the spline is crumbly or broken, you'll need to replace it. Remove the damaged screen and measure it, as well as the spline if you intend to replace it.

To do a taut, wrinkle-free and professional installation, try a pro's trick: Bend the door slightly at the center before you install the replacement screen. An easy way is to attach clamps to both long sides of the frame and suspend weights from them, enough to bend the door downward about a half inch in the mid-

dle. This will bring the edges of the door closer together. When you release the weights after installing the screen, the edges will move to their original shape, making the screen tighter.

Lay the replacement screen over the entire door, with at least 2 inches of overlap along the entire perimeter of the spline groove. Starting at a corner, use the convex wheel of the roller to push the new screen into the groove, working out the wrinkles as you go. (If you use the concave wheel, you could rip the screen.) Push the spline down into the groove with the roller's concave wheel until it's flush with the frame (the top of the spline is level with the top of the groove in the frame).

Afterward, take off the weights and the screen will stretch perfectly taut. Slowly and carefully cut away the excess screen, and you're done.

Sliding Screen Doors

This design improvement is a delight to work with, but only if the frame is also made of wood. Most are aluminum

and relatively flimsy. While you can still fix small breaks in the screen as described above, a full "screenectomy" is trickier than the same operation on a wood door. The flimsy frame is almost impossible to keep square, and it's like wrestling an octopus.

Remove the screen door by sliding it all the way open and lifting it off the track. Place it on sawhorses and check the tiny roller wheels at the bottom corners, often made of plastic; if they are badly worn or damaged, replace them. If not, oil them, vacuum the track where they run, and give thanks. These are not stock items, and finding exact replacements is inevitably a challenge; knowing where the door was purchased helps, but not always. The adjusting screws that raise or lower the wheels are located on the bottom edge; unscrewing them all the way releases the wheel mechanism. Good luck finding one exactly like it, but odds are you'll have to replace the entire screen door if you can't find a match.



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HOW TO ADJUST SCREEN DOORS

You can set the speed your screen or storm door closes with only a screwdriver.

In the past, the automatic screen-door closer was a large spring, guaranteed to make the door close emphatically and make children cry by pinching their fingers or pulling their hair. Then technology came along, with a door-mounted shock absorber that gently, safely and quietly closes the door.

A shattering Slam! cuts right through your pleasant dreams. Few other ambient noises are so uniquely attuned to the human nervous system. Even the cat, which was sleeping peacefully on your legs, spasms awake and jumps down to seek cover. Anywhere within earshot, either sleeping on the couch

or the hammock, immersed in a peace that passeth understanding, you soon realize that adjusting that door is a must-do chore.

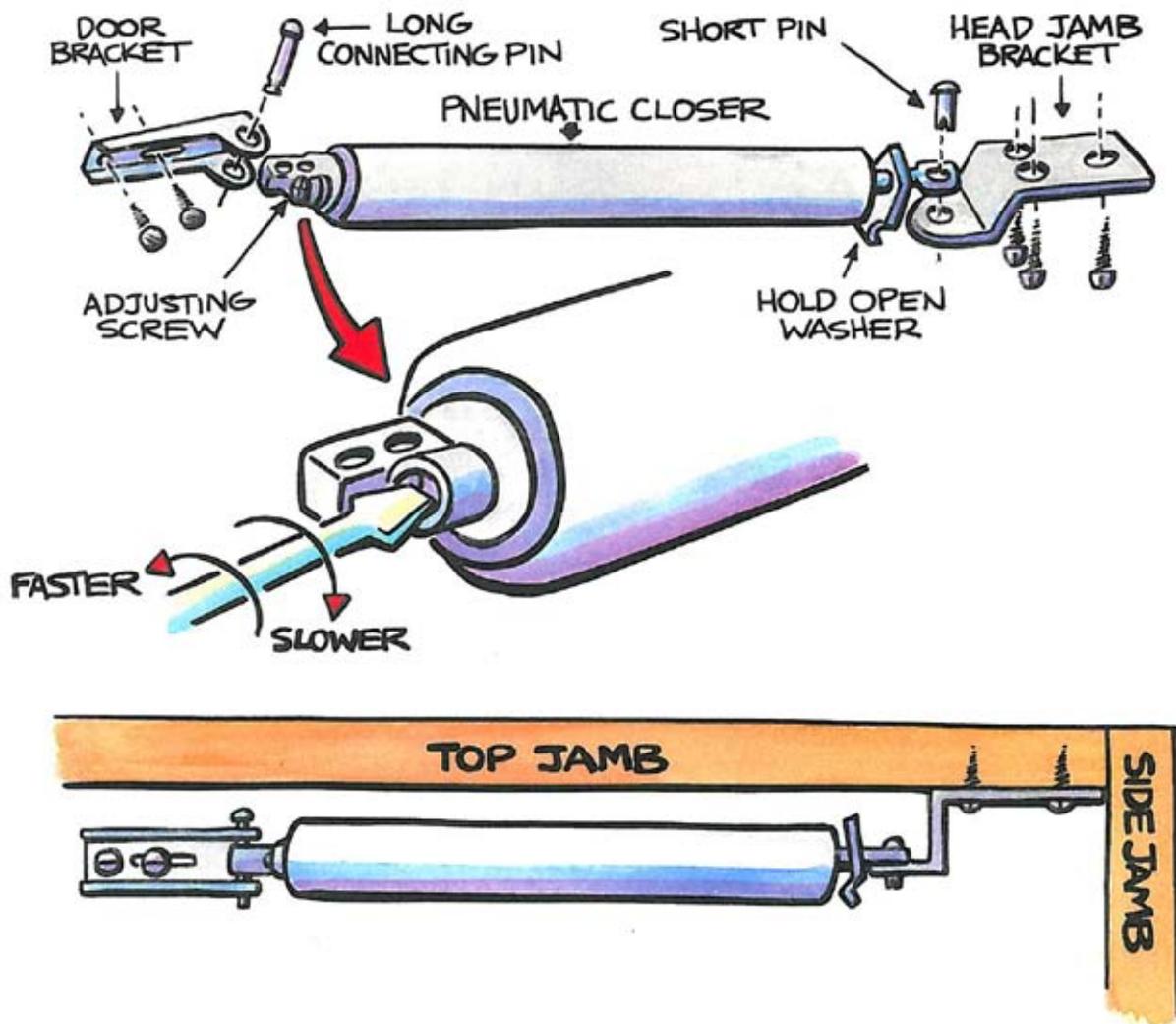
So you rise, stretch and fetch a slotted and a Phillips screwdriver, a can of light machine oil, and prepare to take on that aggressive door.

Fortunately, it's not rocket science. The unit is basically a spring-loaded shock absorber. Prop the door open and examine the mechanism. At the end of the piston that mounts to the door, there is an inset screw. Turn it 180 degrees clockwise and let the door close.

Too slowly? Door doesn't close all the way? Turn the screw 90 degrees coun-

terclockwise and try that. After each adjustment, I open the door fully and let it hiss closed until I'm satisfied with the operation of the door. By making minute adjustments, you can tune a screen-door closer to fit your fancy.

While you are tinkering with a large spring-loaded piston around hinges and other dangerous moving parts, avoiding a painful blood blister should be in the front of your mind. If the little lock-open tab that slides along the piston is accidentally released, the spring can suck the web of your hand right into the tube, and pinch it. It will hurt a lot. This is the voice of experience—it's why I sometimes use



With Phillips and flathead screwdrivers, you can make all the necessary adjustments so that your screen door closes quietly and securely.

my trusty door wedges even for this job, rather than trusting the little sliding lock-open tab.

As long as I'm there, I also check out the little felt cushions (on wood doors) or rubber seals (combination storm/screen) between the door and the jamb. Finally, I oil the hinges and the latch. Everyone will notice the improvement and can resume resting.



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HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST DOORSTOP

Installing the right doorstops will reduce damage to your walls (and your toes).

Over the years, traditional impromptu front-door stops have included everything from Grandpa's duck decoy to jars of pennies to umbrella stands. They keep the doorknob from bumping into the wall—or the door from being closed suddenly by an errant breeze or cross draft. But there's a better, more elegant and permanent solution.

To prevent damage to the wall from the doorknob, the best solution is a permanent doorstop of some kind. Depending on your needs and tastes, they can be mounted on the baseboard, the floor, the center hinge of the door, or on the wall. Exact placement is im-

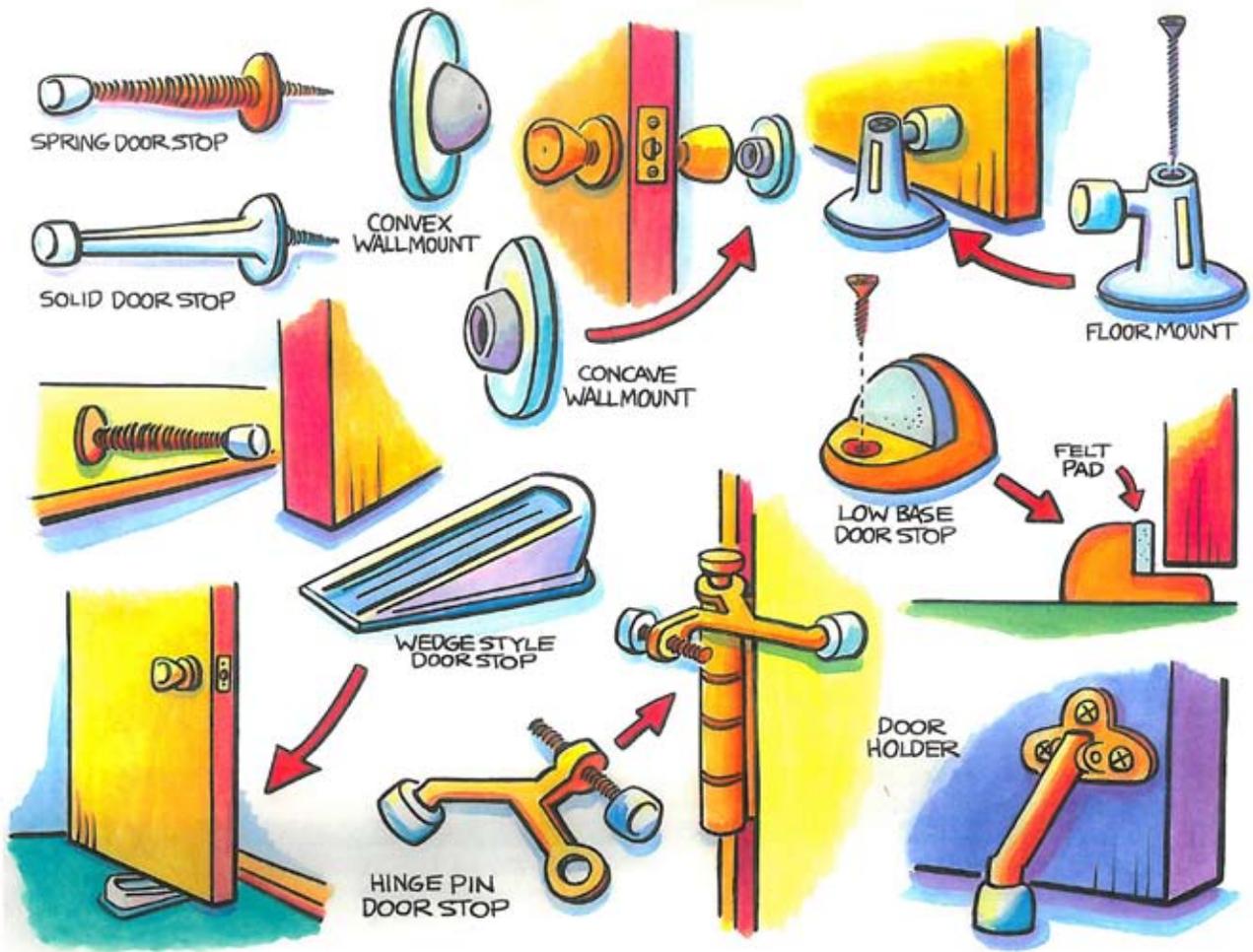
portant. If you have a damaged doorstop, installing its replacement will be a no-brainer. But a door without a stop gives you some interesting choices.

Let me say first that I never work on a door without a small safety wedge, which is a kind of portable doorstop. Made of rubber or wood, it will keep the door stable and stationary. Until you have been struck in the forehead by someone opening the door you are working on, as I have, you may think this is excessive caution. Ever since the second time it happened, I have used two wedges, one on either side.

Hinge-mounted types are the easiest to install—just pull the center hinge

and put it through the stop, tap the hinge back down in place, and adjust the screw mechanism until the knob misses the wall by a good half-inch. (Putting it on the center hinge places it in the middle of the door to balance the pressure applied to it.) But it works best only on light interior doors. The same is true of doorstops that mount on the baseboard molding.

For a heavier portal such as the front door, a floor mount often is best. A wall-mounted stop requires heavy framing precisely at the doorknob's point of contact with the wall. Doorstops that are mounted only on drywall will most likely be pushed



Your selection of the right doorstop will depend on the weight of the door and the strength of the wall or floor you can attach the doorstop to.

right into the wall. On the floor, however, you always know there's something solid to screw into, and you can put the doorstop wherever you need it. This can be important if the entryway is tiled, so you can position the doorstop so that it's over the grouted area between tiles but on the level tile surface.

Using the wedge(s) to secure the door, fine-tune the placement of the floor stop. When you've decided, close the door all the way—and lock or wedge it, for your head's sake—and take another look. If it's out of the way of foot traffic, nobody will trip on it.

If the bottom sweep of your front door is no more than half an inch, consider a low-base doorstop with a rounded top. They're much easier to sweep around and far less likely to

stub a toe than a high floor-mount stop. With the proper doorstop, you'll protect your toes and your walls.