

Whether your driveway is newly built or an overlay on top of an old driveway, it is probably 1 to 2 inches of hot mix asphalt concrete. The asphalt concrete contains aggregate (stone), asphalt (often referred to as "tar"), and a variety of additives designed to make it last longer. A properly constructed and properly maintained asphalt driveway can last more than 25 years, so it's well worth your while to follow these tips. They'll help you get the greatest return on your pavement investment.

### **1. Help your driveway "cure."**

Depending on the temperature and humidity of the air, your new driveway should be allowed to cure 48 to 72 hours. Keeping people, cars, bikes, etc. off it during that time is important.

Asphalt pavements are "flexible" pavements, which means they will adapt their shape to the surface beneath them and things placed on them. So avoid placing objects on the pavement that concentrate weight on a small area. This is especially important in hot weather. Avoid:

- Parking your car in the same spot all the time.
- Parking motorcycles and bicycles on the driveway (kickstands can penetrate the surface).
- Sitting in lawn chairs on pavement.
- Wearing high-heeled shoes on pavement.
- Parking a trailer or boat on the pavement without putting a piece of plywood beneath each wheel and the trailer hitch to diffuse the weight. The same holds true when using a car jack.

Over time your new driveway will become less "tender," but it will always remain flexible.

### **2. Make sure the driveway's edges offer support to the pavement.**

Sometimes a newly built driveway will be one or more inches higher than the adjacent lawn. As you drive back and forth you put pressure horizontally as well as vertically on the pavement. Because this higher driveway edge is unsupported, it eventually will crack, causing your driveway to prematurely deteriorate. You can eliminate this problem by filling dirt in along the unsupported areas. Place the dirt and then tamp it down. This will support the driveway's edge, offering resistance to horizontal pressures of your car.

### **3. Pay close attention to all pavement cracks.**

Because of the nature of asphalt pavement, your driveway will eventually experience some type of cracking. Cracks are the first step in pavement deterioration. They allow moisture, chemicals such as gasoline and oil, and the sun's ultra-violet rays to penetrate the asphalt concrete. This accelerates pavement breakdown. Proper repair of cracks 1/8 inch wide or larger is the first step to successful driveway maintenance. Contractors are experienced in the cleaning and repair of cracks, and your best bet is to have them repair the cracks for you. They know the methods, have the tools, and have access to high-quality professional products. Cracksealing is an art in itself, and to get the best return on your driveway investment, have a professional contractor do the work.

### **4. Sealcoat your driveway.**

Seal coating is the method of protecting your asphalt pavement by applying a coating to the pavement surface. Oftentimes homeowners try to do this themselves, but hiring a pavement maintenance professional will give you better results.

The professional contractor understands pavement, knows how the sealer works, and is trained to help stop small problems before they become big, expensive problems. He knows the proper techniques to prepare the pavement and apply sealer, he owns and knows how to use the necessary tools, and he also uses a top-quality professional sealing product.

He can also include aggregate in his seal coat, which will make the sealer last longer and assure an abrasive surface for car and foot traffic. Without aggregate a sealed asphalt surface can be slick.

## **5. How seal coat protects your pavement.**

Preceded by effective crack repair, seal coating applied every two or three years can significantly extend the life of your driveway for minimal cost.

*Prevents oxidation.* Asphalt pavement begins to deteriorate almost as soon as it's placed. As the pavement is exposed to oxygen, the asphalt binder (tar) hardens. This hardening results in a brittle surface that will eventually crack. The cracks enable oxygen and rainwater to penetrate the pavement, often into the subbase, weakening it and reducing pavement strength. Sealcoating protects the surface and fills surface voids, reducing the pavement's exposure to oxygen and water, and extending pavement life.

*Resists ultraviolet rays.* These rays from the sun also cause the pavement to deteriorate. They break down the links between carbon bonds in the asphalt, causing the pavement to crumble. Regularly applied sealcoats prevent ultraviolet rays from penetrating the pavement.

*Resists oil and gas spills.* This is especially important on driveways where cars are often parked or worked on. Gasoline or oil will soften asphalt concrete. Coal tar sealers aren't soluble in gas or oil so they prevent damage caused by leaks or spills. Asphalt sealers, which normally would be soluble in gas or water, usually include additives that enable them to resist such leaks. By filling surface voids, sealcoating also reduces the depth to which oil or gas can penetrate the pavement.

## **6. Sealcoat enhances pavement appearance and eases maintenance.**

Sealcoating brings back the dark black color of the original pavement, making it look and wear like new. Sealcoated pavements also are easier to clean and maintain. Because sealcoats fill the surface voids, they make the surface much smoother. A smoother surface is easier to sweep, shovel, and wash.

## **7. Sealcoat new asphalt within the first year of construction.**

But wait at least 90 days. Asphalt concrete needs between 60 and 90 days to fully cure, and contractors should wait that long before sealcoating. If sealer is applied before the pavement has cured, the oils in the asphalt will work their way to the surface and the sealcoat won't adhere properly. Two coats of sealer are recommended-the added cost is minimal compared to the extra protection.

## **8. Sealcoat your driveway every 2 or 3 years**

Sealcoating is a protective film that will wear away-probably in some high-wear areas such as wheel paths-over time. A good rule of thumb is to have the contractor sealcoat your driveway every two or three years. This provides a consistently high level of protection for the pavement, ensuring that it will last longer.

## **9. Selecting your sealer.**

Rely on your pavement maintenance contractors to make this decision: They know what type of sealer is best for your pavement condition and region of the country. Most likely they will recommend one of two types of sealer.

*Asphalt emulsion.* The main ingredient in this sealer is a byproduct of the oil-refining process. It is naturally compatible with the asphalt concrete, but by nature it is less resistant to oil and gasoline spills. Manufacturers of asphalt sealers modify the asphalt emulsion with special additives that make it more resistant to gasoline and oil spills.

*Refined coal tar emulsion.* Coal tar is a byproduct of the steel manufacturing process. After it has been refined it is used as a sealer for both pavements and roofs. Coal tar emulsion is naturally resistant to oil and gasoline spills.

Many sealcoating materials sold in hardware stores and other do-it-yourself outlets are not as high of a quality as that used by professional pavement maintenance contractors. Contractors are trained professionals whose livelihood depends on the quality of their work. Therefore, they are closely tied to reputable manufacturers who make a consistently high-quality sealer designed for professional use.

Sealers used by professional contractors often:

- Are thicker.
- Have a higher solids content (which is important for filling in surface voids).
- Contain additives that will speed drying, reduce tracking, improve adhesion to the pavement surface, and generally extend the life of the sealcoat.
- Will have the proper aggregate content to provide an abrasive surface.

#### **10. Rely on your pavement maintenance professional.**

Your driveway is a significant investment in your property. Proper maintenance by a skilled professional can help make your investment last more than twice as long as unmaintained pavement, thereby extending the life of the pavement and saving you money over the long run.

Your pavement maintenance contractor is trained in detecting and repairing pavement defects ranging from base failure to crack repair and sealcoating. He has the tools, the knowledge, and the know-how to do the job right. Rely on him to help you maintain a long lasting, quality pavement.

For best maintenance results, call your pavement maintenance professionals at:

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BLACKTOP MAINTENANCE SERVICE  
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