

Double glazed windows earn their keep on cold mornings and windy nights. When they work well, you barely think about them. When they start to mist, stick, or let in a chill, you notice every draft. The good news is that most problems are fixable, and a little routine care can add years to a unit's life before you face the cost of full replacement. I have repaired and specced more units than I can count, from 1990s aluminum sliders to modern wood-clad tilt-and-turns. Patterns repeat. Most failures come down to moisture management, moving parts that never get lubricated, and seals that reach the end of their service life a few years earlier than the frame around them.

This guide walks through what fails, what can be repaired, when replacement makes sense, and how to stretch the useful life of your windows with inexpensive maintenance. Along the way, I will tackle two common questions: Can you fix blown double glazing, and what really works for misted double glazing repairs?

How double glazing is built, and why it fails

A standard double glazed unit is a sealed glass sandwich called an insulating glass unit, or IGU. Two panes of glass sit separated by a spacer bar around the edge. The spacer creates a gap, usually 12 to 20 millimeters wide, filled with dry air or an inert gas such as argon. The perimeter is sealed with adhesive sealants, typically polyisobutylene for the primary seal and silicone or polysulfide for the secondary. Inside the spacer there is desiccant, a drying agent that soaks up residual moisture.

The IGU is then installed in a frame, often uPVC, timber, aluminum, or a composite. Weather seals and gaskets keep rain and wind out. Hinges, locks, and friction stays control the sash. Everything expands and contracts a little, and over years of solar heating and winter chill, that movement tests seals and hardware. When the perimeter seal fails, outside air and moisture can enter the cavity. The desiccant buys you time by absorbing that moisture. Once saturated, the next cold spell makes water condense on the inner faces of the glass. That is the classic blown unit: foggy and often streaked inside the cavity.

Frames have their own aging process. uPVC can warp slightly with heat, especially in darker colors, and may crack if screws are overtightened. Timber moves with humidity and needs paint or varnish to fend off rot. Aluminum conducts heat well, so thermal breaks and good gaskets are vital. None of this is fragile engineering, but each piece relies on the others staying dry, aligned, and lubricated.

Typical lifespans and realistic expectations

A decent IGU lasts 10 to 20 years on average. I have seen units fog at year 7, usually budget builds with warm-edge lookalike spacers but cheap secondary sealant. I have also seen 25-year-old units still clear, because the fabricator used high quality silicone and the frames were well protected from standing water. Hardware such as hinges and locks often need attention sooner, typically after 8 to 12 years with regular use.

If your windows are in full sun and face harsh weather, expect the shorter end of those ranges. If they are shaded and the frames are sheltered by good overhangs, the long end is attainable, especially with care. There is no magic to it, only moisture control and mechanical sympathy.

Signs your windows need attention, and what they mean

Pay attention to specific symptoms. Each one points to a different repair path.

Misting or fog inside the cavity means the IGU seal has failed. On a chilly morning, you will see beads or a cloudy film between the panes that cannot be wiped off. Sometimes it comes and goes with weather, but the trend is one way. The desiccant is saturated.

Condensation on the room-facing inner pane is usually not a window fault. That is a humidity issue indoors. Bathrooms, kitchens, and tightly sealed homes in winter often hit high relative humidity. The glass is simply the coldest surface, so moisture condenses there. Ventilation and heat balance fix this, not glass replacement.

A cold draft with no obvious gap often traces to tired gaskets or compression seals. Over time, rubber flattens and loses spring. The sash still latches, but the seal does not compress. A smoke pencil or an incense stick can help trace the leak.

Sticking or dropped sashes indicate hinge or friction stay wear. The sash may drag on the frame or refuse to close without a lift. Misalignment puts strain on the locks, and that can escalate into broken gearboxes in multipoint systems.

Water pooling in the frame or on the sill points to blocked drainage channels. Most uPVC and aluminum frames have weep holes designed to drain water that makes it past the outer seal. If those clog with debris or insect nests, water finds its way indoors.

Flaking or blackened beads at the unit edge signal perished external sealant or cracked glazing beads. Sun and UV take a toll, and once the perimeter sealant loses adhesion, wind-driven rain will exploit it.



Each of these has a practical repair that costs far less than a new window, unless the frame itself has significant structural decay.



Can you fix blown double glazing?

If blown means the IGU has lost its seal and the cavity mists, the honest answer is mixed. You cannot restore the factory seal of a failed IGU on-site to its original thermal performance. The long-term cure is to replace the IGU within the existing frame. That said, there are repair services that drill small holes, flush the cavity, and install vents and desiccant plugs. These vented repairs clear visible fog in many cases and buy time, often a few years. They do not recreate an argon-filled, hermetically sealed unit, and the U-value will be a little worse than a new sealed IGU. If you are selling soon or trying to stretch a renovation budget, the drilled vent approach can make sense. If your priority is energy performance and longevity, swap the IGU.

I use a simple rule. If the unit is under 10 years old and the frame is in good condition, I recommend a like-for-like IGU replacement with modern warm-edge spacers and low-E glass. If the unit is 15 years or more and other sashes are starting to fog, a vented repair might be a strategic stopgap while planning either a phased IGU replacement or full window upgrades.

The cost difference is real. Vented misted double glazing repairs are often half the price of a new IGU, sometimes less, depending on glazing size and access. New IGUs vary widely by spec, but most homeowners see the value in replacing once and solving the problem for another decade or more.

What actually happens during an IGU replacement

People worry that replacing the glass means tearing out the whole window. It usually does not. A competent glazier removes the glazing beads that hold the IGU in place, carefully pries out the old unit, checks packers and shims, cleans the rebates, and sets the new IGU. They replace any tired gaskets, confirm drainage pathways are open, and reinstall the beads. On timber, they will re-bed the unit with appropriate sealant and pins or clips. **Double Glazing Repairs** It is tidy work. A typical casement sash takes under an hour once the new unit is on site. Large patio doors take longer due to weight and safe handling. You keep your frame, trims, and finishes intact.

If I am on a job like this, I use the opportunity to adjust hinges, lubricate locks, and replace perished seals. It adds little time and improves the overall feel of the window. Homeowners notice the difference right away: a clean, clear view and a sash that closes with an easy, even pressure.

Is misted double glazing always a lost cause?

Not always. If the misting is very light and seasonal, check the frame for water ingress reaching the IGU edge. On poorly sealed exteriors, rainwater can soak the perimeter and overwhelm the secondary seal. Renewing the external sealant, particularly the head where water lingers, can slow or stop further deterioration. It will not reverse a saturated desiccant, but I have seen early cloudiness stabilize for years after a careful re-seal, especially on sheltered elevations.

For vented repairs, the result depends on how badly stained the inner glass surfaces have become. If you can see mineral streaks, those will not vanish. You might still be happy to live with faint ghosting, but it is better to judge that on a test pane before committing to a whole elevation.

Preventive maintenance that extends lifespan

Maintenance does not mean babying your windows. It means two short sessions a year and a few habits during harsh weather. The payoff is years added to the life of the IGU seals and the hardware.

- Seasonal checklist: clean drainage, seals, and moving parts
- Light lubrication: hinges, friction stays, and locks
- Seal inspection: exterior and interior beads and caulk
- Ventilation habits: manage humidity in winter
- Shade and heat moderation: protect south-facing uPVC

Drainage comes first. Look for the small weep holes on the outside bottom of the frame. Poke them clean with a cable tie and flush with a syringe or a squeeze bottle of water. On sliding doors, vacuum the track channel where grit accumulates. Standing water against the IGU edge accelerates seal failure.

Clean the inner rebates and gaskets with a mild, non-solvent cleaner. Harsh solvents soften some gaskets and attract dirt. Warm water with a drop of dish soap does the job. Wipe dry so dirt does not cake into sticky paste.

Lubricate moving metal parts sparingly. A Teflon or silicone spray works on friction hinges. For locks and multipoint gearboxes, a light machine oil or a dedicated lock lubricant keeps things smooth. Avoid thick greases that collect grit. Open the sash, apply, cycle the mechanism, and wipe off the excess.

Inspect external sealant and glazing beads. Fine cracks at the head and corners invite water. Cut out and re-seal with a high-quality, frame-compatible product. On uPVC frames, low-modulus neutral cure silicone is usually the right choice. On timber, consider a paintable hybrid polymer that tolerates movement and can be overcoated. Do not bridge weep holes with sealant.

Manage indoor humidity in cold weather. If you wake to wet inner panes, run extraction in bathrooms and kitchens longer, use trickle vents if fitted, and avoid drying clothes on radiators without ventilation. Aim for 40 to 55 percent indoor relative humidity in winter. That balance is easier on the IGUs and your lungs.

On south and west elevations, consider external shading where practical. Even a light screen or a projecting awning over large patio doors reduces heat buildup in the frame, which eases mechanical stresses on the seals.

Hardware repairs that make windows feel new again

Hardware often fails gracefully, which means people live with annoying windows for years. The fixes are straightforward. A dropped uPVC casement sash can usually be lifted back into square with hinge adjustments. Modern friction stays have small screws that change the friction and the stop. If the screws are fully seated and

the sash still drags, the hinge arms may be bent or worn. Replacement pairs are inexpensive, but you need the correct stack height and length. Take measurements before ordering.

Multipoint locks lose alignment when sashes shift. You can often regain smooth operation by adjusting the keeps on the frame. Mark the original position, then move in small increments until the handle lifts and throws without force. Never plan to shoulder the handle home; that is how gearboxes crack. If the handle flops or locks do not engage, the gearbox may have failed. It can be swapped without changing the whole frame, though you will need the manufacturer or a compatible pattern part. Bring the old gearbox to the supplier for a match.

Perished gaskets are another high-value repair. Measure the profile and replace with the same or a compatible bulb or flipper type. This one change cures many drafts and rattles. On timber windows, replacing tired brush seals in sashes and meeting rails is similarly impactful.

The economics of repair versus replacement

I often sketch a simple table for clients, not with prices that change weekly, but with decision triggers. If the frame is structurally sound, not warped, and you like its look, invest in IGU replacement and hardware refresh. If the frame is decaying, the sashes are twisted, or you want a different style or color, full replacement is more rational.

Take energy performance into account. Modern IGUs offer low-E coatings, argon fill, warm-edge spacers, and sometimes triple glazing. Upgrading from a clear air-filled unit from the early 2000s to a modern low-E argon unit can cut heat loss through that opening by 20 to 40 percent, depending on the original spec. If the home has many failing units, upgrading the lot brings indoor comfort gains you can feel immediately.

That said, do not chase tiny efficiency gains at the cost of moisture control. An IGU with great numbers on paper can fail early if it is bathed in standing water or installed with poor packers that stress the edges. Choose a reputable fabricator and installer, then invest a few minutes twice a year in maintenance. The net result beats a theoretical best-in-class unit installed carelessly.

When misted double glazing repairs are the right call

There is a niche where vented repairs shine. Heritage frames that you want to keep, access constraints where removing a large IGU is risky, or a short-term plan for the property. I once serviced an upper bay on a narrow street where a full IGU swap required a lift and traffic management. The owner planned to sell in 18 months. We performed drilled vent repairs, cleared the fog, improved the view, and left the unit performing acceptably. The sale went through, and the new owner later committed to a comprehensive refurbishment. That solution would not satisfy someone seeking the best thermal performance, but it matched the circumstances.

Ask the repairer about warranty terms. Most vented repairs come with a short warranty, often one to three years. A new IGU from a good fabricator usually carries a longer warranty for seal failure, frequently 5 to 10 years. Warranty terms matter when you weigh costs.

Edge cases: laminated glass, safety zones, and coatings

Not every unit is a standard clear float pair. Bathrooms and near doors often require safety glass, either toughened (tempered) or laminated. Toughened panes must be ordered to size and cannot be cut after tempering. Laminated units add weight and have a plastic interlayer that complicates vented repairs. If you have privacy glass or integrated blinds in the cavity, vented fog-clear treatments are either not possible or yield poor results. In those cases, plan for full IGU replacement.

Low-E coatings can be soft coat or hard coat. Soft coat units usually perform better thermally but are more delicate during manufacturing and installation. The coating faces into the cavity, out of reach. When you replace an IGU, match or improve the coating type and specify the orientation correctly. A wrong-side-in coating still looks fine but can lose thermal benefits.

How to spot a good contractor for double glazing repairs

Most of the quality shows in the questions they ask and the details they notice. A good contractor will check for frame drainage, look for bowed beads, test hardware operation, and measure the glass, not just the sash daylight. They will ask about condensation habits and show you which seals are compressed. For IGU replacements, they should offer warm-edge spacers by default and a low-E spec suitable for your climate.

Ask for examples of similar repairs and what failed afterward, because every seasoned installer has a story about a mis-sized packer or a warped top light that taught them something. You want that accumulated experience on your project, not the gloss of a brochure.

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Step-by-step: unclogging weep holes and resealing small gaps

If you only follow one small routine, make it this pair of tasks at the turn of each season. It takes under an hour for a typical home and often solves minor leaks and drafts.

- Run a soft brush and vacuum along frame tracks and sills, inside and out. Locate exterior weep holes at the bottom of frames. Use a cable tie or pipe cleaner to clear debris, then flush with warm water from a squeeze bottle until it runs free.
- Inspect external sealant around the frame perimeter. Where you see hairline cracks or gaps at corners and the head, cut out loose material with a sharp utility knife. Clean the area with isopropyl alcohol. Apply a thin bead of neutral cure silicone for uPVC or a paintable hybrid for timber. Tool it smooth and keep weep paths open.

These two small actions reduce water load on the IGU edges and keep frames dry. That one-two punch buys your windows time.

What not to do

A few well-meaning mistakes show up over and over. Do not block trickle vents to stop a draft. Fix the seals and keep the vents; your indoor air quality will thank you. Do not spray expanding foam into gaps near the glazed unit. Foam can trap moisture against the frame and make future repairs messy. If you must insulate, use backer rod and appropriate sealants. Do not use petroleum-based lubricants on modern uPVC gaskets. They can swell or degrade. Stick with silicone-safe products.

Avoid glass polishes that claim to remove haze inside the unit. If the clouding is in the cavity, no polish can reach it without compromising the seal. Save your effort for solutions that address the cause.

A note on climate and placement

Windows on the windward side of a coastal home face salt and driven rain. Expect faster corrosion on hardware and keep up with rinsing and lubrication. Inland, south-facing windows with wide paved patios below get reflected heat that bakes the lower sashes on summer afternoons. I have measured frame surface temperatures exceeding 60°C on dark uPVC in full sun. That kind of heat cycling ages seals faster. External shading, light-colored frames, and smart landscaping help moderate the extremes.

In cold climates, triple glazing and deeper frames change the calculus. If your home already has triple units and you see misting, replacing with like-for-like is almost always the right move. Vented repairs on triple units are rarely satisfactory. The additional cavity makes flushing tricky and the performance penalty more noticeable.

Pulling it together

Extending **Misted Window Repairs** the life of double glazed windows is not mysterious. Keep water moving away from the glass edges, maintain seals, and protect moving parts. When a unit blows, judge whether you need the full performance of a new IGU or whether a vented repair buys you useful time. Remember that frames are the foundation. If the frames are sound, you have options. If the frames are failing, direct your budget where it counts and replace the assembly.

For many homes, a sensible sequence is the most economical path. Start with maintenance and easy wins: clearing drainage, replacing gaskets, lubricating hardware. Upgrade underperforming IGUs in the most exposed rooms first, especially where comfort matters most, such as living rooms and bedrooms. Use misted double glazing repairs selectively, with clear eyes about the trade-offs. Reassess annually, and keep notes on which windows were serviced and when. Over years, this steady approach delivers warm rooms, quiet nights, and clear views without runaway costs.

If you take one thing away, let it be this: windows fail from the edges inward and from neglect outward. Give them dry edges, a little attention, and the right repairs at the right time, and they will repay you with a longer, more comfortable life.