

weekend project

Screen-It-Yourself Porch

A clever new way to replace or install porch screening

by Joseph Truini

The traditional method of screening a porch has pretty much remained the same for a hundred years. That's unfortunate, because it's a flawed system. Small tacks or staples are used to attach the screening to the porch posts and railings. Then, narrow wood battens are nailed up to conceal all of the seams and fasteners.

It's a labor-intensive method, and screens installed this way typically develop noticeable sags after just a few months. Plus, when it's necessary to replace a damaged screen or fix a sagging one, you must remove several battens and yank out about a million fasteners.

But there is a much better and easier way to install screens, and it doesn't require a lot of experience. This "Weekend Project" will show you how to

rescreen an existing porch using the Screen Tight installation system. You can use the same techniques detailed here for new and remodeled porches, deck enclosures, breezeways and gazebos.

SYSTEM ANALYSIS

Screen Tight is a cleverly designed, all-vinyl system that consists of two main

Photographs by Don Taylor



SCREEN STAR: THIS RENOVATED PORCH SPORTS all new screening installed with a low-maintenance vinyl track system.



1 REMOVE the narrow 1×2 wood battens to expose the staples that secure the old screens in place.

stretches tighter and is less expensive. Fiberglass screening, sold at home centers and hardware stores, starts at 15 cents per square foot;

aluminum costs 25 cents per square foot.

You can buy the rubber spline (12 cents per linear foot) and a spline-roller tool (\$6) wherever screens are sold. Be sure to use .175-in. rubber spline for fiberglass screen and .160-in. spline for aluminum screen. This system will cost about \$1 per square foot for all the materials, including the Screen Tight components, fiberglass screen, rubber spline and screws. *(continued)*

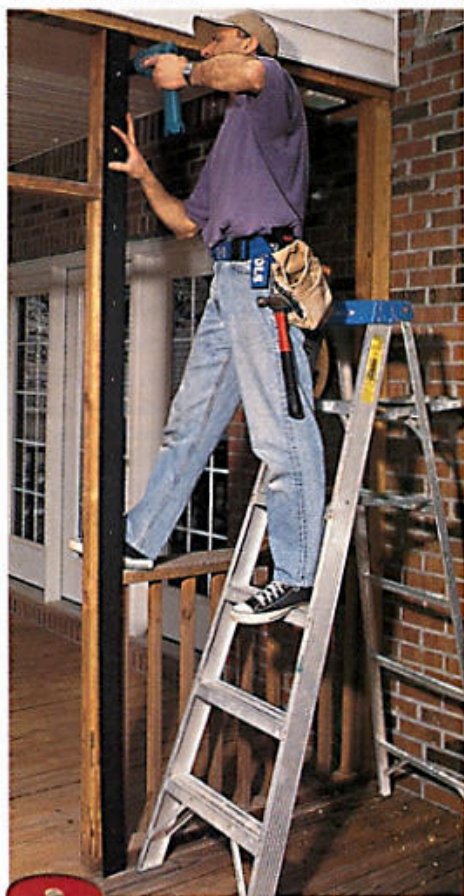


2 PRY THE VERTICAL 1×4 battens from the porch posts. Pull down all the old screening and pound the staples flat.

components: a black base strip and a snap-on cap trim, which comes in white, gray, beige and brown.

The base strip is screwed in place around the perimeter of each opening that will be screened. It comes in 8- and 12-ft. lengths, and in two widths for attachment to 2×4 and 4×4 framing. Molded into the surface of the base strip are two grooves, which accept the rubber spline that secures the screen in place. Once the screens are installed, the cap trim is snapped on to conceal the base strip and screen splines.

You can use either fiberglass or aluminum screening, although fiberglass is a better choice because it's easier to handle,



3 FASTEN THE vertical base strips to the outside of the porch posts. Use the 3½-in.-wide base for 4×4 posts.



4 USE PRUNING shears or tin snips to trim the base strips to length. Screw 1½-in.-wide base to 2×4 rails.

To contact the manufacturer of this system, see "Where to Find It," on page 87.

We installed Phifer Wire's standard black fiberglass insect screening in the openings above the handrail.

Below the railings and on the porch door, we installed Phifer's new PetScreen (55 to 68 cents per square foot), a durable material that resists tears and punctures from pet claws. This vinyl-coated polyester is much stronger than standard screening.

Fiberglass and aluminum screening come in a variety of colors. However, black screening is typically the best choice for porches and doors because it's less reflective and offers much better visibility than lighter colors, especially bare aluminum.

We also replaced the warped wood door with Screen Tight's Better Board solid-vinyl screen door. This unit never needs painting and it won't rot, split or fade. Available at most home centers, it comes in 32- (\$58 to \$68) and 36-in. (\$62 to \$72) widths.

PREPARING THE PORCH

Start by using a hammer and flat bar to pry off all the wood battens nailed to the porch framing. On our porch, we removed the horizontal 1×2 battens first (photo 1, page 63), then yanked off the vertical 1×4 battens that were nailed to the 4×4 posts (photo 2, page 63).



5 PULL THE SCREEN fabric tight with one hand as you roll the spline into the groove in the base strip.

Once you have removed the battens, cut down the old screens with a utility knife. There will be many old tacks and staples left behind, which you can either pull out with pliers or tap flush with a hammer. (We employed both methods to create flat, smooth surfaces.)

Next, fasten a vertical base strip to each porch post with 1-in. screws (photo 3, page 63). Put a single screw in each prepunched slot and another one 2 in. from each end of the strip. The screws should be driven snug but not so tight that they deform the vinyl strips.

(continued)



6 TRIM AWAY excess screening by drawing a utility knife along the edge of the raised spline groove.



7 ON THIS porch, we installed tough, tear-resistant PetScreen to the lower portion of the walls and to the door.

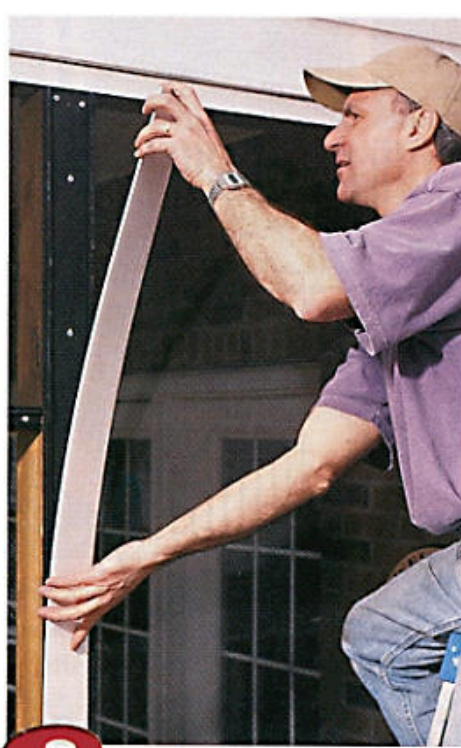
Then, screw the horizontal base strips to the framing that spans between the vertical posts. Trim the strips to length with pruning shears (photo 4, page 65). They can also be cut with tin snips, a hacksaw or a power miter saw. Install the remaining base strips, making sure to drive a screw through each slot and 2 in. from each end.

SCREENING PROCESS

Installing screening with a spline roller isn't difficult, but it does take a certain amount of practice before you can do it



9 USE A nonmarring mallet to tap the narrow cap trim onto the base strips that are screwed to the 2x4 railing.



8 COVER UP the base strips and screen splines on the 4x4 porch posts with long pieces of wide cap trim.

quickly and effortlessly. Keep these tips in mind: Always install the top edge of the screen first, followed by the two sides and finally the bottom edge. Pull the screen taut with one hand as you roll the spline into the groove with the splining tool (photo 5, page 65).

If you create a wrinkle or fold in the screen, pull out the spline and start again. When securing the bottom edge of the screen, check to make sure the screen is flat, wrinkle-free and relatively tight. If it isn't drum-tight, don't worry. When you snap on the cap trim the screen will tighten up quite a bit.

Trim off the excess screen with a sharp utility knife (photo 6, page 65). Work slowly and with great caution; one small slip and you'll slice open the new screen.

After screening in the upper portion of the porch walls, repeat the process on the lower half. If you've got a dog or cat (or both), consider installing a

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CUT the narrow, horizontal cap trim to length with pruning shears after tapping it onto the base strip.

more durable screening to the openings below the handrail (photo 7, page 67).

Once all the screening is up, install the cap trim, starting with the vertical pieces (photo 8, page 67). Align the cap with the base strip, then strike it with a plastic or rubber mallet until it snap-locks into place. Use the same method to install horizontal cap trim along the top and bottom of the walls, and along the handrails (photo 9, page 67). Let these pieces run

long, then trim them to length with pruning shears (photo 10).

After we completed screening in the porch, we hung the new vinyl screen door (photo 11), which perfectly matched the bright-white cap trim. ●

Get information on the manufacturers in "Where to Find It," on page 87.



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FINISHING TOUCH: To complement the new screening system, we installed a matching solid-vinyl screen door. It never needs painting.