The Best Caulking for Sealing Windows

One of the best ways to improve the energy efficiency of your home and to prevent leaks and drafts is to thoroughly seal your windows. For windows that don't open or parts that don't move, the material of choice is caulk. However, when you go to buy caulk for your sealing project, you'll discover there are a wide variety of choices, which may make it difficult to decide which one is best for you. Learning more about the qualities of some of the more suitable types may make the decision simpler.

Latex

Latex caulk often is combined with acrylic. You also may find acrylic caulk, which has similar properties to latex. These caulks are water based, which means they contain no volatile chemicals, clean up with soap and water while they are in liquid form, and can be smoothed by dampening your finger and running it along a bead of caulk. Some caulks can't be painted, but latex caulks can, and you can buy pre-tinted caulk. Latex caulks can't withstand big temperature changes or a lot of moisture, but their ease of use and ability to be painted makes them an excellent choice if you want to do some sealing on the inside rather than the outside.

Siliconized Latex

Siliconized latex is very like acrylic latex, but it contains silanes, a type of silicone, thus the term "siliconized." The silicone helps the caulk adhere better. Siliconized latex has the same basic properties as acrylic latex, being water based, paintable and tintable, but is more durable and can withstand more severe conditions than plain latex can. This is a good choice if you want the ease of use latex offers, but are sealing windows from the outside and need something more resilient.

Silicone

Silicone caulks are made from silicone elastomers, which are very rubbery when the caulk cures. Temperature is not an issue with silicone, and these caulks not only are waterproof, but don't form mildew -- a particularly helpful quality if you want to caulk on the outside. There are two kinds: acid-cure and neutral-cure. Acid-cure is handy if you're working with nonporous surfaces, and so might have appeal if you need to do any sealing around the actual glass. Otherwise, neutral-cure is the better choice, as it is good for use on wood and won't corrode metal or plastic like the acid-cure type can, so you could use it safely around something such as vinyl siding. Most silicone caulks cannot be painted. They don't adhere as well as other caulks, but their superior waterproofing abilities make them have great appeal.

Polyurethane

Polyurethane caulks are resistant and stick well to many materials, even ones that are not similar, such as plastic and wood. They also are noncorrosive, making them safe to use on many materials. The major drawback of a polyurethane caulk is that it's not resistant to UV light, so it needs to be painted to protect the caulk from damage. Polyurethane is solvent based, unlike latex caulks, so it needs paint thinner or mineral spirits for working and cleanup rather than water.