

Screen/Storm Door Combo Saves Money



Above, combo doors are easy to install. No cutting is required. Pre-drilled installation and assembly holes eliminate guesswork.

Photo by Pella

Top, this strong condo door has two retractable screens, strong corner supports and threshold weatherstripping.

Photo by ProVia



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Q: My screen door needs to be replaced. I thought about getting a screen/storm combo door with a glass panel for winter. Is it worth spending more for a combo door?

A: A primary door is a relatively small area, but even an insulated one can lose a significant amount of energy. Doors typically have glass—which has a lower insulation value—and the 10 feet of weatherstripping leaks air, so adding a combo door makes energy sense.

Before you consider adding a combo screen/storm door, make sure your primary door closes tightly and seals well. A combo door will improve energy efficiency, but it is not designed to correct problems with an old warped primary door.

If possible, buy replacement weatherstripping for your existing door from the original manufacturer. If you cannot find it, most home center stores sell generic weatherstripping. Pry off the old door molding, fill any gaps around the framing with foam insulation and caulk around the primary door frame.

The combo door construction is important for a nice appearance, long life and security. It must withstand a lot of abuse, so don't just pick the cheapest one. High-quality combinations—such as those from ProVia Spectrum—have internal polymer corner supports, rigid insulated foam core, reinforced kick panels and triple bottom-sweep weatherstripping.

Buying an aluminum combo door and installing it yourself is typically the lowest-cost option. Aluminum combo doors are lightweight with the glass panels removed, so installing one is a simple do-it-yourself project. They are made to the standard sizes of primary door frame openings.

With the store display door attached to a wooden door frame, the aluminum frame feels strong. When you open the box at home, the unattached aluminum frame strips are flexible. Be careful not to kink them during handling. Apply a bead of silicone or siliconized acrylic caulking on the aluminum frame before screwing

it to the door opening.

The newest, most convenient design of combo door uses one or two spring-mounted roll-up retractable screens built into the door. For ventilation, just lower the glass and pull the screens down. This design is attractive because the screen is hidden away during winter without having to remove and store screen panels.

If you plan to use natural ventilation during the summer, a self-storing triple-track combo door is a reasonably priced option. The screen panel has its own vertical track in the door, so it never has to be removed. At winter's end, slide one of the glass panels down and slide the screen panel up for ventilation.

For families with large pets or active children who may damage the screening, durable stainless steel screen fabric is available in retractable screen doors. It also is a simple DIY project to add this durable screening to a panel door.

If your budget is tight, consider making your own door. It is easy to mount hinges in the existing door opening for the storm door. Make a simple wood frame for the new door with only the top half open and a plywood lower panel. This panel improves rigidity for the door for a more airtight seal and better durability.

Most home center stores carry sheets of clear acrylic plastic to mount in the frame. Make another narrow wooden frame slightly larger than the open half and mount the acrylic sheet in it. Screw it over the door opening. Make a similar frame with screening in it for summer use.

If you prefer more durability and efficiency, and a perfectly clear view outdoors is not critical, select double-walled polycarbonate instead of acrylic. You can barely break the polycarbonate even with a big hammer.

Nail ½-inch-wide spring steel weatherstripping in the door opening on the latch side and top and bottom. This type of weatherstripping is durable where there is sliding friction. Adhesive-backed ¾-inch foam weatherstripping is effective in compression on the hinge side. ■