If you have waking-up-to-condensation windows, or a pane that looks like it's been permanently fogged by a coastal mist, you are probably living with a blown double glazed unit. It is one of those household problems that rarely gets urgent attention until the heating bill creeps up or the living room feels cooler than it should. I have replaced and repaired hundreds of these units, from terraced houses with 1990s uPVC to large timber sashes in conservation areas. The choice always narrows to two approaches: quick patches that buy time, or long-term fixes that restore performance. Both can be right, depending on budget, window type, and how long you plan to stay put.

What "blown" actually means

A standard double glazed unit is a sealed sandwich of two panes with a spacer bar around the perimeter. The cavity holds dry air or a gas like argon. The spacer contains desiccant beads to mop up residual moisture. When the edge seal fails, outside air and water vapor creep in. The desiccant saturates and stops absorbing. Moisture condenses on the inner faces, and you see misting between the panes that you cannot wipe away. That failure can be a slow weep after years of sun and frost, or it can be sudden after a building shift, a poor install, or a slammed sash.

Some people call any condensation "blown." That can be misleading. Surface condensation you can touch is usually a ventilation or thermal-bridging issue, not a failed unit. True blown double glazing shows moisture trapped inside the sealed cavity, often with visible droplets, tide marks, or patchy haze that comes and goes with the weather. Search results for Misted Double Glazing Repairs and Double Glazing Repairs will mention polished fixes, but the underlying physics is simple: once the perimeter seal is compromised, the unit slowly loses its insulating gas and dries poorly. Thermal performance drops, and the problem rarely self-corrects.

How to confirm the fault without guesswork

A few checks spare you from chasing the wrong problem.

Start by cleaning the inside and outside face of the glass thoroughly. If the misting is still there, and it looks like it sits within the thickness of the glass, the unit is almost certainly blown. Next, look for water beads or a milky smear that moves when the sun hits and disappears when the night cools. That daily yo-yo is a classic sign. Then check the glazing beads and gaskets. Hard, shrunken, or split gaskets point to a fatigued seal. If you have a thermal camera or even one of the better phone adapters, you can scan the window on a cold morning. A blown unit shows up as a cooler patch compared to intact neighbors, sometimes with cold plumes around the edge spacer.

I have also seen edge cases: a unit that looks clear in summer but blooms with mist in October, or a bathroom window with internal surface condensation that mimics the look. If you are still unsure, a competent window technician can lift a bead on a uPVC frame in a few minutes, inspect the unit edge, and reinstall it without damage. The callout is worth it if you are on the fence about replacing multiple panes.

What you lose when a unit is blown

The visible fog is annoying, but the hidden cost is thermal. An argon-filled, low-e double glazed unit with warm-edge spacer can show a centre-of-glass U-value around 1.0 to 1.2 W/m^2K in reasonable conditions. Once it has lost gas and pulled in moist air, that creeps up. You will not suddenly halve your heating efficiency, but you will feel more radiant chill near the glass and see more condensation on room-side surfaces during cold spells. Sound insulation also suffers a little because the gas composition and cavity conditions have changed. If you have south-

facing rooms, you might notice a slight increase in solar heat on bright days because the haze diffuses light, but that is a small and inconsistent trade.

Quick patches: what they are, where they work, and the compromises

There are quick fixes marketed as miracle cures for foggy windows. They exist on a spectrum, from tidy and honest to gimmicky and short-lived. The common thread is that they do not restore the factory seal. They treat the symptom, either by venting moisture or masking the fog.

One approach involves drilling micro-holes into the unit, usually at the bottom corner, sometimes paired with a top vent. The idea is to let moist air escape and to install a valve or plug with a desiccant or hydrophobic membrane. When done neatly, the pane can dry out over days or weeks. You regain clear vision, at least for a while. The downsides are straightforward: you no longer have a sealed insulating glass unit, so thermal performance is permanently compromised. In exposed locations, dust can creep in, and in certain winds you can hear faint whistling through poor valves. I have used this technique to buy time for homeowners selling a property who needed clarity for photography, or where budget could not stretch to replacement in the same year. Most of those panes needed full replacement within one to three winters.

Another patch is to replace only the failed perimeter gaskets in the frame and reseal the glazing beads, hoping to shore up the edges. This can help stop external water ingress and reduce draughts. It does not reseal the unit itself, but if your misting is marginal and driven by rain pooling along a degraded frame seal, you can slow the fogging and improve comfort. This is one of the more honest band-aids because it also preserves the frame and can be part of routine Double Glazing Repairs, not just emergency tinkering.

I am occasionally asked about anti-fog coatings or the idea of injecting dry gas. Coatings on the room side can help with surface condensation you can touch, not with moisture trapped between panes. As for injection, unless you have a specialist rig and the original edge seal integrity, you rarely get durable results. It is like inflating a tyre with a nail still lodged in it. You may roll for a bit, but you are not fixing the puncture.

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For timber sashes, you sometimes see a hybrid fix: dry the pane with gentle heat, drill and plug, and add discreet trickle vents in the sash rail. Done carefully, it can clear the view without spoiling the joinery. Still, the Double Glazing Repairs insulating value lags behind a proper replacement.

Long-term fixes: replace the glass unit, not the entire window

The durable solution is to swap out the sealed glass unit. This does not mean ripping out frames. In most uPVC and many aluminium or timber windows, you can pop the internal beads, support the sash, and slide the old unit out. The new one drops in with appropriate packers, the beads go back, and you reseal. The operation for a typical casement takes under an hour per window for an experienced fitter, more if access is poor or the beads are brittle.

This route restores thermal performance and clarity, and it gives you choices. If the unit was an older spec, you can upgrade quietly: low-e glass on the correct face, argon fill, a warm-edge spacer, and perhaps a laminated pane on

the outside for acoustic or security benefit. You can also match patterned glass in bathrooms and keep trickle vents and cill details intact. For large bays or shaped panes, lead times stretch and the price rises, but the method holds.

A point often missed: replacing the glass unit can address hidden frame issues if you pair it with fresh glazing tape or gaskets. A lot of “cold window” complaints disappear after a unithswap, not only because of the glass but because the reseating fixes micro-gaps that had grown over years of thermal movement.

Where full window replacement makes sense

Sometimes, the glass is not the main problem. If you have warped or rotted timber, bowed uPVC frames, failed hinges that will not hold a seal, or aluminum from the 1980s with significant thermal bridging, replacing only the glass is lipstick on a pig. On older uPVC, the reinforcements can be loose and the screw holds tired. I carry a torque driver for a reason: you can feel when fasteners are no longer biting cleanly. If your frames are past their best, a new IGU will still improve things, but you will not get the draft-proofing, locking, or acoustic gains you likely expect. A full replacement window brings modern multi-chamber profiles, better seals, and sometimes an A-rated overall energy score. The upfront cost is higher, but long-term you stop chasing leaks and adjusting hinges every winter.

Money talk: rough costs and value over time

Prices vary by region, supplier, and size, but patterns hold. A simple replacement IGU for a small casement, clear float glass with argon and warm-edge spacer, often lands in the low hundreds including fitting. Large patio doors or shaped panes climb to several hundred per unit, especially with laminated or toughened glass. Specialist solar-control coatings add more. By contrast, drilling and venting services for Misted Double Glazing Repairs are usually quoted at a lower figure per unit, often appealing for a whole-house treatment. The catch is the lifecycle. A properly made and installed replacement unit should last 10 to 20 years, sometimes longer if protected from harsh sun and if drainage paths are maintained. A vented quick fix might give you one to three years of acceptable clarity. On a cost-per-year basis, replacement wins unless you genuinely only need a short-term solution.

There is also the energy bill. I have seen houses drop a few hundred pounds a year after tackling multiple failed units, though that improvement usually rides alongside other sensible steps like sealing trickle vents properly, adjusting hinges, and adding curtains or blinds with snug returns. It is rare to recoup the full cost in energy savings alone, but comfort and resale value tip the scale. A surveyor’s report calling out failed double glazing tends to invite either a price chip or a promise to replace.

Practical details that determine whether a repair sticks

The best long-term repair still fails early if installed poorly. Spacer bar quality matters. Over the years I have had fewer callbacks on units with stainless or composite warm-edge spacers compared with older aluminum types. The desiccant load and the primary sealant chemistry also count. But the installer’s habits are just as important. Clean, dry rebates. Proper packer placement to avoid sash twist. Drainage channels checked and blown clear. A bead seated without rolling the gasket. If you can, ask the fitter how they will support and pack the unit. If they stare blankly or say “just by eye,” keep shopping.

For timber windows, glazing putty and linseed oils can undermine modern edge seals if used incorrectly. Isolate the seal with glazing tape, and do not flood the perimeter with solvents. For aluminium, ensure thermal break integrity and use compatible setting blocks. For uPVC, mind the wedge gasket size. I have seen units where a slightly undersized wedge left a hairline gap that wicked water and led to another failure.

Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing yourself?

Homeowners with patience can handle some tasks. Replacing a uPVC IGU is doable if the beads are internal and you are comfortable lifting glass safely. You will need glazing packers, suction cups, a stiff putty knife or bead lifter, and a tube of neutral-cure silicone or a compatible glazing sealant. The risk lies in ordering the wrong size. Measure tight across the visible glass, then add the correct overlap for the rebate, and specify thickness precisely. Even a 2 mm mismatch can leave beads loose or impossible to refit. Also mind safety glass rules near doors and low-level glazing. If you get that wrong, you can invalidate insurance and compromise safety.

Drilling and venting as a DIY fix is another matter. You might restore clarity for a bit, but you are committing to a non-sealed unit and risking glass breakage. A single slip with a carbide bit on tempered glass usually ends with a thousand pieces on the floor. If your aim is a short-term visual improvement before a planned replacement, it is cleaner to budget for new units and schedule them when the supplier lead time aligns with your calendar.

When a quick patch is the right call

I am biased toward long-term fixes because I am the one who gets the callback when a patch fails. That said, there are times when a temporary approach is perfectly reasonable. If you are letting a property and need to restore a clear view while awaiting a major refurbishment, venting might bridge a winter. If a single unit fogs in a rarely used room and the budget is spoken for elsewhere, resealing beads and gaskets can buy time. If the window is due for replacement but you are waiting on planning permission for a wider project, you can drill and dry to avoid living with a milky pane.

In those cases, be honest about expectations. You will not restore the insulating performance of a sealed, gas-filled unit. You are buying clarity and a bit of time.

Subtleties that separate a good replacement from a great one

Most homeowners focus on glass spec and price. I look at climate, elevation, and aspect. A north-facing wall in a wet, windy valley deserves a robust edge sealant and a spacer that tolerates thermal cycling. A south-facing bedroom with strong sun might benefit from a low-e coating tuned to avoid over-reflecting heat in winter. On coastal sites, I specify corner keys and sealants rated for salt exposure wherever possible. If noise is a concern, a slight asymmetry in pane thickness helps more than you might expect. Twenty-eight-millimetre units with 4 mm and 6 mm panes can outperform symmetric 4-4 in the mid frequencies.

Think about drainage too. Even the best unit will sit in a frame that channels water away. If those paths clog with paint or debris, standing water stresses the seal. When fitting a new unit, I run a small probe through the frame weep holes and, if necessary, enlarge a stubborn one by a millimetre or two. You cannot see the difference, but the next storm tells the story.

Maintenance that keeps new units clear for years

Double glazing is not fit-and-forget. It is low maintenance, not no maintenance. Wash down frames and gaskets a few times a year with mild soapy water. Avoid aggressive solvents that embrittle rubber. Inspect wedge gaskets for shrinkage and replace them before they pull away from corners. Keep trickle vents free of fluff; poor ventilation inside the house increases surface condensation and can drive confusion about whether a unit has failed. On timber, maintain paint or stain so water does not sit in rebates. On uPVC, do not silicone over frame drainage slots in a well-meaning attempt to stop drafts. You will trap water and hasten the next failure.

Navigating quotes and warranties

If you request quotes for Double Glazing Repairs or replacement IGUs, read the small print. You want clarity on glass spec, spacer type, gas fill, and the warranty on the sealed unit. Ten years is common in the UK for decent units, though the frame and hardware may carry different terms. Ask whether the warranty is pro-rated and whether labor is included if a unit fails under warranty. Some suppliers offer long glass warranties but leave you paying for the refit time, which blunts the value.

If you live in a conservation area or a building with restrictive covenants, check whether the new units must match original sightlines or glazing bars. You can still replace failed units, but you may be tied to slimline units or heritage details that affect lead times and cost.

Real-world examples that show the decision pivot

A family house on a windy hill had seven misted units, most on the west side. The frames were solid uPVC, gaskets tired but intact. We replaced the IGUs with argon-filled, low-e units and warm-edge spacers, and we swapped wedge gaskets across the run. The homeowners reported a noticeable reduction in drafts and a quieter living room, and their winter gas usage dropped modestly. In that case, long-term replacement was a no-brainer because the frames were sound and the house was a long-term home.

By contrast, a landlord managing a flat scheduled for full renovation the next summer needed a quick uplift for viewings. Two lounge panes were heavily fogged. We drilled and vented, installed discreet valves, and the panes cleared in about a week. Everyone knew it was a stopgap. The units were replaced six months later during a broader window upgrade. The patch did its job: it made the space presentable without dragging forward a larger expense.

Another edge case: an Edwardian bay with single-glazed timber sashes retrofitted in the 1990s with slim double glazed units. Several had blown, and the rails showed early rot. Replacing just the IGUs would not address the failing timber, and slimline units have inherently less desiccant capacity, so their longevity is more variable. We recommended new sashes with better drainage detailing and quality seals, keeping the original frames to respect the facade. The owner spent more upfront but stopped the cycle of frequent failures.

Answering the most common questions, briefly

Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing? Yes, but define “fix.” If you mean restore clarity and performance for years, replace the sealed unit. If you mean make it look better for a while, venting or resealing around the frame can help.

Do you have to replace the whole window? Usually not. Most jobs involve replacing just the insulated glass unit, which preserves frames and decor.

Will drilling void warranties? Almost certainly. If the unit is within warranty, contact the original supplier first.

Does blown double glazing affect health? Not directly. The main impacts are heat loss and visibility. However, cooler surfaces increase the chance of surface condensation on the room side, which can encourage mold on frames or nearby walls if the room is poorly ventilated.

Is it worth upgrading glass spec during replacement? If you plan to stay, yes. Low-e coatings, argon fill, and warm-edge spacers are modest increments in cost with long comfort benefits. Acoustic and laminated options are valuable on busy roads or for ground-floor security.

How to choose between a patch and a proper fix

Think about time horizon, frame condition, and total cost of ownership. If you plan to live with the window for years and the frames are sound, replace the unit and sleep easy. If you are deferring a bigger renovation or you just need a clear view for a fixed period, a quick patch can be a tool, not a trick. Use it knowingly. For many homes, a phased approach works: tackle the worst units this season, schedule the rest next year, and pair the work with frame maintenance so you are not repeating the cycle.

Windows fail for predictable reasons, and they reward thoughtful repair. Done well, a new sealed unit returns your view, cuts heat loss, and avoids the foggy dance with every weather change. Done hastily, a patch looks clever for a few months, then sends you back to the same decision. When you weigh the options with a realistic view of cost and lifespan, the right choice tends to announce itself.