

Buyer's Checklist: Cheap vs Quality Exterior Doors

What to look for before you buy. A Canadian homeowner guide

10-point checklist before you buy any exterior door

1 Confirm the core material

Polyurethane foam core gives much better insulation than polystyrene. Steel and fiberglass options both come in cheap and quality versions, the difference is the core.

2 Check the U-factor and ER rating

ENERGY STAR certified doors list a U-factor (lower is better) and Energy Rating (ER) value. A door without these printed values is a builder grade product.

3 Inspect the weatherstripping detail

Quality doors use a magnetic seal or compression bulb that lasts decades. Foam strips peel off in two to four winters.

4 Look at the threshold construction

An adjustable threshold lets you fine-tune the seal as the home settles. Fixed thresholds are a tell of a low-cost product.

5 Verify hinge gauge and screw length

A good entry door uses three or four heavy hinges with at least one 3-inch screw per hinge that anchors into the framing, not just the jamb.

6 Read the warranty page carefully

Look for stated coverage on glass, paint, weatherstripping, and labour separately. A blanket lifetime claim with no detail is marketing.

7 Ask about the lockset prep

Quality doors come pre-bored for a deadbolt that meets ANSI Grade 1 or 2. Cheap doors are bored for entry-grade hardware only.

8 Confirm the paint or finish process

A factory-applied paint with a stated cycle (primer + topcoat + clear) outlasts a single-pass spray finish at the dealer.

9 Get the install method in writing

Replacement vs full frame replacement matters. A door dropped into a damaged jamb leaks no matter how good the slab is.

10 Add up the 10-year cost, not the sticker

A higher-end door installed once is often cheaper across a decade than a builder grade door that gets replaced and reseals heat losses.

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