CALGARY ROOF REPAIRS

Cedar Shake, Slate & Specialty

Cedar shake care and replacement, synthetic shake and slate, clay and concrete tile roofs

4 Expert Answers from Roof IQ

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Q1

What does a roofer look for on an aging cedar roof in Airdrie?

Splitting shingles, soft spots underfoot and daylight showing through the deck are the three things a roofer zeros in on first when assessing an aging cedar shake roof. In Airdrie's climate, those signs tend to arrive faster than homeowners expect.

What a Cedar Shake Inspection Actually Covers

Shake condition is the starting point. A roofer looks for shakes that have split along the grain, curled at the tips, gone grey and brittle, or lost so much thickness that water can track underneath. Calgary's region sits at roughly 1,045 metres elevation with dry air, and Airdrie shares that exposure: shakes dry out and crack between seasons, then absorb snowmelt during chinooks. A roofer will check whether the splits are cosmetic or whether water has been sitting in them long enough to rot the shake below.

The deck underneath matters just as much. Cedar shake is typically installed over spaced strapping rather than solid sheathing, which means a roofer needs to look at each board for soft spots, delamination or rot. Soft spots underfoot during an inspection are a red flag that the damage has moved past the shakes themselves. Deck replacement adds roughly $65 to $130 per 4 by 8 sheet beyond the basic labour, so knowing the deck's condition before signing a contract matters.

Eave protection and underlayment are checked next. The National Building Code requires eave protection extending at least 900 mm up the slope to a line at least 300 mm inside the inner face of the exterior wall. On an older cedar roof, this layer is often a basic felt that has dried out or torn. A roofer will note whether it is still intact or whether water has been reaching the deck directly.

Flashings and valleys are common leak points. Step flashings at dormers and chimneys corrode or pull away from the wall over time. Valley metal on cedar roofs can hold debris and stay damp, accelerating rust. A roofer checks whether the flashing can be reused or needs replacement, which affects the quote significantly.

The attic rounds out the picture. A roofer or the homeowner can check from inside for water stains, frost on the sheathing in winter, or daylight showing through gaps. Poor attic ventilation is a common companion to an aging cedar roof and contributes to ice dams during Airdrie's freeze-thaw cycles.

On permits: if the inspection leads to a like-for-like cedar replacement, the City of Airdrie does not require a building permit under Alberta's Permit Regulation, provided there is no structural change. Switching to a different material type, such as asphalt or metal, is worth confirming with the City of Airdrie before signing anything, and the contract should spell out who arranges any permit if one turns out to be needed.

On cost: a cedar shake replacement in the Airdrie area runs roughly $10 to $18 per square foot installed, putting a typical house somewhere between $20,000 and $36,000 depending on roof size, pitch, deck condition and the product chosen. A paid inspection, if you want a written report before committing, typically runs $150 to $400.

For an honest read on whether your Airdrie cedar roof has years left, have a local roofer inspect it; our form will pass the request along.

Q2

Should cedar shakes be treated or oiled in Alberta?

Treating or oiling cedar shakes can extend their life, but in Calgary's climate the results are mixed and the timing matters more than most homeowners expect.

What treatments actually do

Raw cedar contains natural oils that resist moisture and decay, but Calgary's dry air, intense UV, and roughly 128 freeze-thaw cycles a year accelerate the loss of those oils. Once the wood dries out and checks (splits along the grain), water gets in, freezes, and widens the cracks. A penetrating oil or preservative treatment slows that process by keeping the wood more supple and water-repellent.

The most useful products are penetrating oil-based preservatives, not film-forming sealers or paint. Film-forming products trap moisture beneath the surface, which leads to peeling and accelerated rot. Look for a product designed specifically for cedar or wood shingles, with a mildewcide and UV inhibitor included, given how much sun Calgary roofs receive at 1,045 m elevation.

Timing is critical. New shakes should weather for at least six months before any treatment, so the wood opens up enough to absorb the product. After that, a re-application every three to five years is a reasonable target, though a roof in full sun on a south-facing slope may need it more often. The best window is a dry stretch in late spring or early summer, after freeze-thaw season and before hail season peaks in June through August.

Condition determines whether treatment is worthwhile. If the shakes are already heavily split, cupped, mossy or showing rot at the butts, treatment will not reverse the damage. A roofer who works with cedar can tell you whether the roof is a candidate for treatment or whether replacement is the better call. Many Calgary homeowners with older cedar roofs are switching to architectural asphalt, synthetic shake or metal, partly because those materials need no ongoing maintenance and hold up better against hail.

A few practical points worth knowing before you hire someone to treat the roof:

- Moss and algae must be removed and the roof allowed to dry completely before any product is applied; treating over moss seals it in and speeds decay
- Any contractor applying product on the roof is working at height and must comply with Alberta OHS fall protection requirements, which means protection from a fall of 3 m or more; confirm they have a written fall protection plan and WCB-Alberta coverage before they start
- If your cedar roof was installed before 1990, have a roofer check whether any underlayment or flashing materials contain asbestos before disturbing them
- Some insurers charge more for older wood shake roofs or limit coverage on them because cedar is more combustible than asphalt or metal; ask your insurer where your policy stands before investing in treatment

Treatment is a maintenance cost, not a substitute for a roof that has reached the end of its life. A roofer experienced with cedar can inspect from the ridge down and give you an honest read on whether the deck and shakes are worth preserving.

Q3

Do cedar roofs raise home insurance in Alberta?

Cedar shake roofs typically cost more to insure in Alberta, and some insurers will not cover them at all. The premium increase varies by insurer and policy, but a cedar shake roof is widely treated as a higher-risk material because it is combustible, it ages faster in Calgary's dry, high-altitude air, and it is more vulnerable to hail damage than modern asphalt or metal alternatives.

Why insurers treat cedar differently

Untreated wood shakes are more combustible than asphalt shingles or metal, which matters to underwriters in Alberta. Beyond fire, cedar shakes split and curl as they dry out, which creates gaps that let water in during freeze-thaw cycles. An aging shake roof is more likely to produce a leak claim, and Calgary's roughly 128 freeze-thaw cycles a year accelerate that deterioration faster than in milder climates.

Hail is the bigger issue for most Calgary homeowners. Cedar shakes crack and split under hail impact, and Calgary sits in what the City of Calgary calls hail alley, the part of Canada that sees the most hail. The August 2024 storm alone generated about $2.8 to $3 billion in insured losses across the city. Insurers pricing that risk into premiums for a material that performs poorly under hail is not surprising.

The practical consequence: some insurers charge more for older wood roofs or limit the coverage they offer, and the terms vary from one insurer to the next. If you are buying a home with an older cedar shake roof, call your

insurer before closing, not after.

What changes the picture: replacing cedar with a Class 4 impact-resistant asphalt shingle system can work in the other direction. The Insurance Bureau of Canada notes that a majority of insurers offer premium savings of up to 50% for hail-resistant materials. The City of Calgary has noted that Class 4 shingles reduce the chance of hail damage significantly and that the added cost tends to pay for itself over time. Ask your insurer specifically what discount applies to your policy, because the number varies.

For cost context, replacing a cedar shake roof in Calgary typically runs about $10 to $18 per square foot, putting a typical house in the $20,000 to $36,000 range. Switching to architectural asphalt shingles is cheaper, roughly $5 to $8.50 per square foot, and switching to Class 4 shingles adds about 10 to 20% to that. Either way, the insurance savings over several years can offset a meaningful portion of the replacement cost, so it is worth getting a number from your insurer before you choose a product.

One permit note: like-for-like re-roofing (cedar to cedar) does not require a building permit under Alberta's Permit Regulation, provided there is no structural change and no health or safety issue. Whether cedar to asphalt counts as a similar type of material is not spelled out, so confirm with your municipality before signing. If you are switching to a heavier material such as slate or clay tile, contact the City of Calgary or your municipality before signing anything, as a permit and possibly a structural review would be needed.

Get your insurer's number first, then quotes for cedar and for its replacements, and the right choice usually becomes clear.

Q4

Why are my cedar shakes splitting on the south side in Calgary?

South-facing cedar shakes in Calgary take a beating that shakes on any other exposure simply do not. The combination of intense UV radiation, Calgary's dry high-altitude air, and the city's roughly 128 freeze-thaw cycles a year creates a cycle that splits wood faster than almost anywhere else in Canada.

Why the South Side Is the Problem

The south slope gets the most direct sun year-round. In summer that means repeated heating to very high surface temperatures, which drives moisture out of the wood rapidly. Calgary's elevation and dry air accelerate that drying. Then a chinook rolls in during January, the snow melts off the roof in an afternoon, the wood absorbs moisture, and overnight temperatures drop and it refreezes. Wood fibres expand and contract with each cycle, and over years the grain separates along natural lines, producing the splits and checks you are seeing.

UV degradation compounds this. The south slope loses its protective surface oils and grey-weathers faster than north or east exposures. Once the surface is weathered and the wood is brittle, even moderate hail, which Calgary sees every summer, can crack a shake that would have flexed a decade earlier.

A few other contributors are worth checking. If the attic below the south slope runs hot in summer because ventilation is inadequate, the underside of the shakes dries from below while the sun dries them from above, which accelerates splitting. Calgary's building code requires attic vent area of at least 1/300 of the insulated ceiling area, with at least 25% of that at the ridge and 25% at the eaves; a blocked or undersized ridge vent on the south side makes the problem noticeably worse. Also check whether the shakes were installed with the correct exposure and spacing to allow for seasonal movement; tight installation leaves no room for the wood to breathe.

Age matters most. Cedar shakes installed before roughly 2000 are now 25 years or older. A well-maintained cedar roof lasts 25 to 35 years in Calgary conditions, but the south slope typically shows failure five to ten years ahead of the north slope on the same house.

What to do now. Have a roofer look at the south slope from the ground and, if safe, from a ladder at the eave. Splits that run through the full thickness of the shake let water in; those shakes need replacing. If fewer than roughly a quarter of the south-slope shakes are split, selective repair is reasonable at a cost of about $300 to $1,000 for a small patch, up to $1,000 to $3,000 if the damage is more widespread. If the splits are widespread across the whole slope, a full replacement conversation makes sense. Cedar shake replacement in Calgary runs about $10 to $18 per square foot installed; many owners on a full replacement are switching to architectural asphalt, synthetic shake or metal, which handle Calgary's UV and freeze-thaw cycle better and do not require the same maintenance.

A like-for-like cedar replacement needs no City of Calgary building permit. Switching to a different type of roofing material does require one.

Before any roofer starts work, ask for a written contract with the scope, materials, start date and payment schedule, and check their Alberta prepaid contracting licence through Service Alberta if any deposit is involved. A WCB-Alberta clearance letter is worth requesting as well.

When you want a written quote on that south slope, a couple of local roofers can look at it through Calgary Roof Repairs.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Calgary Roof Repairs. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority (the City of Calgary or your own municipality) before starting any roofing project. Information is current as of November 1, 2026 and may change. Visit **calgaryroofrepairs.com** for the latest answers.