

OTTAWA DRIVEWAYS

Troubleshooting

Diagnosing cracking, heaving, settling, and
drainage faults

5 Expert Answers from Driveway IQ

ottawadriveways.com/construction-brain

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Q1

Where is the survey pin on an Ottawa lot?

Survey pins in Ottawa are outside the scope of what we cover here — driveway sealing, asphalt paving, interlock installation, and driveway repair are our focus, and survey pin location is a land surveying question that requires a licensed Ontario Land Surveyor (OLS) to answer accurately for your specific property.

For survey and property boundary questions, the right resources are:

- **A licensed Ontario Land Surveyor** — search the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors (AOLS) directory at aols.org
- **The City of Ottawa** — call 3-1-1 or visit ottawa.ca for property records and lot grading plans
- **Your property deed and survey plan** — filed with the Ontario Land Registry Office

If your driveway project is what prompted the survey question — for example, you are planning a new driveway, widening an existing one, or need to know your property line before paving — that is something we can absolutely help with. Knowing your lot boundaries matters for driveway width compliance with City of Ottawa zoning bylaws and for making sure your driveway apron and any new hardscaping stays on your property.

For other trades and construction questions beyond driveways, you can also find contractors and resources through the **Ottawa Construction Network at justynrookcontracting.com**.

Q2

Can driveway cracks be repaired in cold weather in Ottawa, or do I need to wait for spring?

Most driveway crack repairs should wait until spring in Ottawa, as cold temperatures prevent proper curing and adhesion of repair materials. However, emergency temporary repairs can be done in milder winter conditions above -5°C using specialized cold-weather products.

Why Cold Weather Crack Repair Usually Fails

Standard crack filling materials — both hot-pour rubberized sealants and cold-pour crack fillers — are designed to cure and bond at temperatures above 10°C. When applied in Ottawa's winter conditions, these materials don't achieve proper adhesion to the crack walls, remain brittle instead of flexible, and often pop out during the first freeze-thaw cycle. The crack filler essentially becomes a temporary plug that fails within weeks.

Additionally, asphalt and concrete contract significantly in cold weather, making cracks appear wider than they actually are during warmer months. A crack that measures 10mm wide in January might only be 5mm wide in July. Filling the winter-widened crack with rigid material can cause the repair to fail when the driveway expands again in spring.

Emergency Winter Repairs

If you have a dangerous pothole or major crack that's creating a safety hazard, temporary repairs are possible during mild winter days (above -5°C with no precipitation). Use a high-quality cold-patch asphalt product specifically rated for cold weather application. Clean the crack thoroughly of ice, snow, and debris, apply the material, and compact it firmly. This is strictly a temporary measure to get you through winter safely — plan for proper hot-pour crack filling in spring.

The Ideal Repair Window in Ottawa

The best time for permanent crack repairs is late April through October when daytime temperatures consistently stay above 15°C. **Hot-pour rubberized crack filler** applied by professionals during this window creates a flexible seal that moves with the asphalt through freeze-thaw cycles. This type of repair typically lasts 3 to 5 years in Ottawa's climate when done properly.

For DIY repairs, late spring (May-June) or early fall (September) offer the most stable weather conditions. Clean cracks thoroughly, use backer rod for cracks wider than 10mm, apply crack filler on a warm dry day, and allow 24-48 hours of dry weather for curing.

Preventing Further Winter Damage

While waiting for spring repair weather, keep cracks clear of standing water, ice, and debris. Water that freezes in cracks expands by 9% and widens them significantly — this is why small fall cracks often become major problems by spring. If possible, squeegee or blow out standing water after winter thaws.

When to Call a Professional

Extensive cracking (more than 25% of the driveway surface), cracks wider than 20mm, or cracks that show signs of base failure underneath should be evaluated by a paving contractor. These issues often indicate that the driveway is approaching the end of its functional life and may need resurfacing or replacement rather than crack filling.

Ottawa Driveways can help you find experienced paving contractors who understand proper crack repair timing and techniques for our extreme climate conditions.

Is it better to patch or resurface an old cracked asphalt driveway in Ottawa?

The decision between patching and resurfacing depends on the extent and type of cracking, but in Ottawa's harsh freeze-thaw climate, resurfacing is usually the better long-term investment if more than 25-30% of your driveway shows significant cracking.

Patching works best for isolated damage — individual potholes, small areas of alligator cracking, or linear cracks that haven't spread extensively. Hot-mix patching costs \$100-400 per pothole and can last 5-10 years when done properly. However, patching only addresses surface symptoms, not underlying base issues that often cause cracking in Ottawa driveways. If your driveway has multiple problem areas scattered across the surface, you'll end up playing an expensive game of whack-a-mole as new cracks appear each spring.

Resurfacing (overlay) makes sense when the existing base is stable but the surface layer has deteriorated from age, oxidation, and Ottawa's brutal freeze-thaw cycles. A 50mm asphalt overlay costs \$3-6 per square foot and essentially gives you a new driving surface over your existing foundation. The key requirement is that your current driveway must be structurally sound — no major settling, heaving, or base failure. Resurfacing over a failed base locks in the problems beneath and will reflect every crack and movement from below within 1-2 Ottawa winters.

Ottawa's climate considerations are critical here. Our 50+ freeze-thaw cycles per winter turn small cracks into major problems rapidly. Water penetrates cracks, freezes and expands by 9%, then thaws and allows even more water to enter. Each cycle widens existing cracks and creates new ones. If your driveway already shows extensive cracking, patching individual areas won't stop the freeze-thaw damage from spreading to untreated sections.

Signs you should resurface instead of patch: widespread surface cracking covering more than 25% of the driveway, multiple areas of raveling or loose aggregate, faded and oxidized asphalt throughout, or surface damage from years of snowplow scraping. **Signs you need full replacement, not resurfacing:** major settling or heaving, large areas of alligator cracking, standing water that indicates base or drainage failure, or an existing driveway that's already been overlaid once.

Timing matters in Ottawa's short paving season. Resurfacing must be done between late May and early October when temperatures consistently stay above 10°C. The existing surface should be cleaned, cracks filled with hot-pour sealant, and any loose material removed before the overlay. A tack coat bonds the new asphalt to the old surface.

Cost comparison for an average Ottawa driveway: Extensive patching of multiple problem areas often costs \$1,500-3,000, while resurfacing the entire driveway runs \$2,500-5,500. Resurfacing provides a uniform appearance

and resets the maintenance clock, while patching leaves you with a patchwork surface that will need ongoing repairs.

When to hire a professional: Both patching and resurfacing require hot-mix asphalt, proper temperature management, and compaction equipment. While homeowners can handle small crack filling with cold-pour products, anything involving hot-mix asphalt needs professional equipment and expertise.

Need help finding a driveway contractor? Ottawa Driveways can match you with experienced paving professionals who can assess whether your driveway is a good candidate for resurfacing or needs full replacement.

How much does pothole repair on a private driveway cost in Ottawa?

Pothole repair on Ottawa driveways typically costs \$100 to \$400 per pothole for professional hot-mix asphalt patching, depending on the size and depth of the damage.

The cost varies significantly based on the repair method and pothole characteristics. **Small potholes** (less than 1 square foot, under 75mm deep) usually cost \$100 to \$200 to repair properly. **Medium potholes** (1-3 square feet, 75-150mm deep) range from \$200 to \$300. **Large or deep potholes** (over 3 square feet or deeper than 150mm) can cost \$300 to \$400 or more, especially if they extend through the asphalt into the base layer.

Professional hot-mix asphalt patching is the gold standard for permanent pothole repair in Ottawa's climate. The contractor cuts out the damaged area with clean, straight edges, removes loose material, applies tack coat to the edges, places hot-mix asphalt in lifts, and compacts with a plate compactor or hand tamper. This method integrates properly with the surrounding asphalt and withstands Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles.

Cold patch repairs cost significantly less (\$50 to \$150 per pothole) but are temporary solutions that typically fail within one to two Ottawa winters. Cold patch doesn't bond well to existing asphalt and becomes loose and crumbly after repeated freeze-thaw cycling. Many contractors offer cold patch as an emergency or budget option, but homeowners should understand it will need to be redone.

Ottawa's extreme climate makes proper pothole repair critical. Potholes form when water penetrates cracks, freezes and expands, then thaws and allows more water to enter deeper into the asphalt and base. Each freeze-thaw cycle enlarges the pothole. Left unrepaired, potholes grow rapidly during Ottawa winters and can damage vehicle tires, suspension components, and undercarriages. They also allow water to penetrate into the base layer, potentially undermining larger sections of the driveway.

Multiple potholes often indicate broader driveway issues. If your Ottawa driveway has developed several potholes, especially if they're appearing along crack lines or in areas that pond water, the underlying base may be failing. In these cases, patching individual potholes is like putting bandaids on a larger problem. A paving contractor should evaluate whether the base needs attention or if the entire driveway is approaching replacement time.

Timing matters for pothole repairs. Hot-mix asphalt repairs should be done when temperatures are consistently above 10°C, typically May through October in Ottawa. Emergency cold patch can be applied in winter conditions, but plan for permanent hot-mix repair in spring. Many contractors offer better pricing for multiple repairs done at once rather than individual service calls.

When to hire a professional: Potholes deeper than 50mm or larger than 2 square feet should be professionally repaired. The contractor has the tools to cut clean edges, proper hot-mix asphalt, and compaction equipment for a

lasting repair. DIY cold patch from hardware stores works for very small, shallow holes as a temporary measure, but won't survive Ottawa's winter conditions long-term.

Need help finding a driveway contractor for pothole repair? Ottawa Driveways can match you with experienced paving professionals who understand Ottawa's climate challenges and use proper repair techniques for lasting results.

Q5

What is the best time to schedule driveway repairs in Ottawa before the busy season?

The best time to schedule driveway repairs in Ottawa is late April through early May, before the peak paving season begins in June. This timing allows you to secure contractor availability and competitive pricing while ensuring proper curing before Ottawa's harsh winter conditions return.

Early spring scheduling offers several key advantages in Ottawa's market. Contractors are typically less busy in April and May, meaning you'll have better selection of qualified professionals and often more competitive pricing. Many paving companies offer early-season discounts to fill their schedules before the summer rush. You'll also avoid the 6-8 week booking delays that become common from June through September when demand peaks.

Weather conditions in late April and May are ideal for most driveway repair work. Asphalt repairs require ambient temperatures consistently above 10°C and rising, which typically occurs reliably by late April in Ottawa. The ground has thawed completely, allowing proper assessment of winter damage like frost heaving, crack expansion, and base settlement. Spring also reveals the full extent of salt damage and freeze-thaw deterioration that accumulated over Ottawa's brutal winter months.

For asphalt crack filling and sealcoating, early May is optimal timing. Hot-pour crack filling should be completed before sealcoating, and both require warm, dry conditions with no rain forecast for 24-48 hours. Completing these maintenance tasks in May gives the repairs maximum time to cure and weather before the next winter cycle. Waiting until late summer means your fresh sealcoat has less time to harden before freeze-thaw exposure begins again in November.

Interlock paver repairs and releveling can often begin even earlier, in mid-to-late April, since these don't require hot-mix materials. Spring is when winter's freeze-thaw cycles and snowplow damage become fully apparent on interlock driveways. Settled or displaced pavers should be addressed promptly to prevent water infiltration that worsens the problem through another freeze-thaw season.

The busy season reality in Ottawa runs from June through early September, with September being the most popular month for major paving projects. During peak season, quality contractors are often booked 6-10 weeks out, emergency repairs cost 20-30% more, and you have less leverage on pricing. Many contractors also prioritize larger, more profitable projects during busy periods, potentially pushing smaller repair jobs to the back of the queue.

For major repairs requiring permits (driveway widening, apron replacement, drainage work), starting the permit process in March or early April ensures approval by your target repair date. City of Ottawa permit processing can take 4-6 weeks, and any work within the municipal right-of-way requires coordination with city inspectors who are also busier during peak construction season.

Winter damage assessment timing is crucial for Ottawa homeowners. Walk your driveway thoroughly in early April once snow has melted completely. Look for new cracks wider than 5mm, areas where water pools, loose or settled interlock pavers, and any sections that seem soft or spongy underfoot. Document damage with photos for contractor consultations. The sooner you identify and address winter damage, the less expensive repairs typically become.

Book your contractor by early May at the latest for summer repair work. Get at least three quotes, verify WSIB coverage, and ask to see photos of recent similar projects. Quality contractors often book their entire summer schedule by late May, leaving only less experienced or overpriced options available for last-minute bookings.

Need help finding a driveway contractor for early-season repairs? Ottawa Driveways can match you with experienced professionals from the Ottawa Construction Network who understand the importance of proper timing and quality workmanship in Ottawa's challenging climate.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Driveways. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any driveway or paving project. Information is current as of October 11, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawadriveways.com for the latest answers.