Keep Your Driveway Smooth: How to Stop Cracks and Potholes Before They Start

A driveway takes a lot of punishment. Every day it carries the weight of cars, foot traffic, and the weather's worst. Over time, small cracks can appear, and if left alone, they often turn into potholes. The good news is that most of these problems are preventable with a little regular care. This guide walks through the main steps to keep the surface sound, and explains what to watch for at each stage.

Start with the base: why what sits underneath matters

Most driveway failures begin below the surface. If the ground beneath was not properly compacted when the driveway was laid, or if the sub-base is too thin for the loads it carries, the surface will eventually sink or crack. A solid base is the best defence against subsidence and potholes.

What to watch: Look for low spots or dips that collect water after rain. Standing water is a sign that the base has settled unevenly. If you see water pooling in the same place every time it rains, that area is already under stress. The weight of a car on that wet spot will push the surface down further, and over winter, freeze-thaw cycles can turn a small dip into a hole.

For existing driveways, you cannot redo the base without removing the surface. But you can slow further damage by improving drainage and by not parking heavy vehicles on the same spot day after day. If the base is badly compromised, resurfacing may be the only lasting fix.

Surface drainage: keeping water moving

Water is the main enemy of any paved surface. It seeps into tiny cracks, freezes, expands, and widens them. Then more water gets in, the cycle repeats, and before long a pothole forms. Good drainage is the simplest way to break that cycle.

What to watch: After a rain, check where the water goes. Does it run off the driveway onto the road or into a drain? Or does it sit in puddles? If the driveway slopes toward the house or toward a low corner where water gathers, you may need to adjust the grading or add a channel drain. Even a small change in the slope can make a big difference. For block-paved driveways, the joints between blocks naturally let water through, but the sub-base must be free-draining or the water will sit underneath and soften the ground.

Another simple check: make sure the gutters and downpipes above the driveway are not emptying water onto the surface. A downpipe that pours onto the drive every time it rains will eventually wash out the jointing sand and soften the base.

Seal the surface: protecting against the weather

A sealed surface is much harder for water to penetrate. For tarmac and resin driveways, a good sealant layer acts as a weather shield. It also helps prevent weed growth, because seeds have a harder time finding a foothold on a smooth, sealed surface.

What to watch: Sealant is not a permanent fix. It wears away over time, especially in high-traffic areas near the garage or where you turn the wheels. Reapply it according to the product instructions, typically every few years. Before sealing, clean the driveway thoroughly and fill any small cracks with a suitable filler. If you seal over dirt or over an existing crack, the moisture will be trapped underneath and the crack will worsen.

For block-paved driveways, the equivalent of sealing is keeping the joints topped up with fresh jointing sand. Over time, rain and traffic wash the sand out. When the joints are empty, the blocks can shift and edges can chip. Sweep dry jointing sand into the gaps and compact it with a plate vibrator or by driving over it slowly. This simple step prevents a lot of surface cracks.

Fill cracks while they are small

Once a crack appears, it will not fix itself. The sooner you fill it, the less chance it has to grow. Crack fillers for tarmac and concrete are widely available and easy to apply. For resin driveways, a small patch kit can repair a crack before it spreads.

What to watch: Not all cracks are the same. A hairline crack in tarmac may need only a liquid filler that soaks in. A wider crack, especially one with a height difference between the two edges, suggests the base has moved. That kind of crack is a symptom of subsidence or a badly compacted base. Filling it cosmetically will not fix the underlying problem; you may need to lift the affected area and re-lay the base. If you see cracks wider than about half a centimetre, or cracks that run all the way across the driveway, it is worth getting a professional opinion before you spend time on a temporary patch.

Remove weed growth promptly

Weeds are not just unsightly. Their roots push into joints and cracks, widening them and letting in more water. A dandelion or grass clump growing in a joint is actively damaging the driveway.

What to watch: Pull weeds when they are small and the ground is moist, so the whole root comes out. For persistent growth in block-paved driveways, check whether the jointing sand has washed out. Refilling the joints with fresh sand and a polymeric stabiliser can stop weeds from taking hold again. On tarmac or resin surfaces, a weedkiller can be used, but be careful not to spill it on the surrounding plants. The best approach is to keep the surface clean and the joints tight, so weeds have nowhere to root.

Manage heavy loads and traffic patterns

Every driveway has limits. A standard residential driveway is not designed to support a skip lorry or a concrete mixer day after day. Even a heavy van parked in the same spot for months can cause the surface to rut or crack.

What to watch: If you regularly park a heavy vehicle, try to vary the parking position so the weight is not always on the same spot. If you are having building work done, ask the delivery drivers to park on the road or on a protective sheet rather than directly on the drive. Also, avoid turning the steering wheel while the car is stationary; that twisting motion puts a lot of stress on the surface and can create small cracks that later become potholes.

When to call in professionals

Some problems are too big for a DIY fix. If the driveway has multiple potholes, extensive cracking, or areas that have sunk noticeably, patching will not restore the structure. In those cases, driveway repair services from a specialist can assess the base and recommend the right solution. A professional team can dig out the failed area, re-compact the ground, and lay new material that matches the existing surface. This is especially important for tarmac and resin driveways, where a seamless finish requires the right equipment and technique.

Another reason to call in experts: if the driveway is more than about fifteen years old and the surface is crumbling or fading badly. Resurfacing at that point is often more cost-effective than years of patch repairs. A good contractor will also check the drainage and the condition of the sub-base, so you get a long-lasting result rather than a temporary cosmetic fix.

Regular checks keep small problems small

The single most effective habit is a quick walk around the driveway once a month. Look for new cracks, loose blocks, standing water, or weeds. Catch these early, and the repair is simple. Leave them for six months, and you may be looking at a pothole or a sunken area that needs professional attention. Keeping the surface clean and the joints filled will extend the life of any driveway by years, and it saves you from the hassle and cost of major repairs later on.

Knowing when to act and when to call for **driveway repair services** is the key to keeping your driveway safe, level, and easy to use. With a little attention and the right approach, most cracks and potholes never get the chance to form.