

Double glazed windows are supposed to be the set-and-forget part of a home. They cut drafts, soften street noise, and tame energy bills. Then one morning the bathroom window looks foggy between the panes, or the bay in the lounge sprouts a milky crescent that won't wipe off. You haven't imagined it. The sealed unit has failed, which most people call blown double glazing. What happens next usually sits somewhere between confusion and overpaying. I've spent years around installers, glaziers, and building inspectors, and I've made my own share of decisions about when to repair and when to replace. Let's separate the common myths from the practical facts so you can choose wisely.

What “blown” really means

A double glazed unit, technically an insulated glass unit or IGU, is two panes of glass separated by a spacer, sealed around the edges to trap a dry, insulating cavity. Many modern units hold argon gas and use warm edge spacers with a desiccant. When the perimeter seal fails, outside air and moisture creep in. The desiccant can sip up some moisture at first, but once it saturates the cavity starts to mist, especially when warm indoor air meets cold outdoor temperatures.

Visible mist is a late symptom. Before that, you might see a tide mark, a faint rainbow haze, or a bead of condensation that appears and disappears with the weather. If the fog lives inside the cavity and won't wipe off either pane, the unit is blown.

A few points help frame expectations:

- The frame usually isn't the culprit. The failure is almost always the IGU's edge seal, not the uPVC, timber, or aluminum frame, unless the frame channels water toward the seal.
- The glass isn't “leaking gas” in a dramatic way. Argon diffuses slowly and is harmless. Its loss mostly affects thermal performance, not safety.
- Once failed, the seal doesn't heal. Warm spells can dry the cavity temporarily, which fools people into thinking it fixed itself, but the desiccant is saturated and the cycle will return.

Why units fail, and how soon

The industry sells double glazing with long lifespans, often 15 to 25 years, and many units do reach those numbers. Plenty don't. Real-world variables matter:



- Sun exposure cooks the perimeter seal. South and west elevations fare worse.
- Poor drainage in the frame lets water sit against the unit edge.
- Pressure differences, especially at altitude, stress seals. If installers didn't specify breather tubes or altitude-appropriate units, the seal carries the load.
- Manufacturing shortcuts, like skimping on primary butyl seal, come back to haunt year five or six.
- DIY pressure washing aimed at window edges drives water under gaskets and accelerates failure.

On well-built homes I commonly see first failures at 8 to 12 years. Coastal spray and harsh sun can trim that to 5 to 7. Units shaded all day can last 20 or more.

Myth: you can drill the unit, dry it out, and call it good

This is the most persistent myth. Some services advertise defogging or "Misted Double Glazing Repairs" that involve drilling tiny holes in the glass or spacer, flushing with air or alcohol, then inserting a valve or vent plug. Short term, the mist clears. Long term, the unit remains unsealed. You trade a failed barrier for a managed leak.

I've tested defogged windows with a thermal camera in winter. They tend to look better than a wet unit but worse than a proper sealed replacement. You'll often see a halo of reduced performance near the drilled area, since the cavity no longer holds argon or stable humidity. If budget is tight and appearance matters more than thermal performance, this route can buy time. Just treat it as a stopgap, not a full repair.

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Fact: the cheapest fix is often a new sealed unit, not a new window

People hear "blown unit" and assume the whole window needs to go. Usually, you can keep the frame and swap the insulated glass. The work takes a competent fitter about 20 to 60 minutes per unit once the replacement is on site. The crucial step is measuring correctly: overall width and height, glass thickness, spacer depth, coatings, and any safety requirements for toughened or laminated panes. A reglaze keeps the look of your frames and costs a fraction of full replacement.

Typical ranges in my notes from recent jobs:

- Small casement unit: 80 to 150 pounds or dollars for standard clear low-E.
- Larger picture window: 180 to 350.
- Oversized or shaped units, leaded patterns, or Georgian bars inside the cavity add 20 to 40 percent.
- Toughened or laminated safety glass increases cost by 30 to 70 percent, partly due to lead times.

Installers often discount when you replace multiple units at once. If five panes on the same elevation have similar age and exposure, consider a batch.

Myth: a misted unit is just cosmetic

It's mainly an appearance problem at first, but performance matters. A dry, argon-filled cavity with a low-E coating and warm edge spacer can cut heat loss noticeably. Once the seal goes, U-value creeps up. How much depends on climate and window size. On a detached house, replacing several failed units before winter can shave 5 to 10 percent off heating fuel compared to living with mist across the largest panes. If the failure is on a south-facing elevation, summer solar gain can also rise because the low-E layer may be compromised by internal moisture and dirt on the inner faces.

More important than energy: moisture inside the cavity can streak and etch glass over time. I've removed units where the inner faces had mineral tracks that no one could clean. Those leave a permanent haze, so even if the mist evaporates on a hot day, clarity never fully returns.

Fact: frames need inspecting, not guessing

You don't want to fit a new unit into a frame that steers water straight at the seal. A quick checklist during survey day saves headaches:

- Open sashes and look for blocked drain holes in uPVC and aluminum. Timber needs weep paths too, often routed grooves.
- Check glazing beads and gaskets. Brittle or shrunken gaskets should be replaced, or the new unit will sit loose.
- Look for signs of movement. A sagging timber transom can pinch the top edge of a unit, stressing the seal. Shims and packers need to be placed properly to carry weight through the frame, not the glass.
- On coastal properties, inspect for galvanic corrosion around aluminum spacers or beads. This can pit the edges and cut seal life.

If an installer doesn't pop a bead or at least probe gaskets during quotation, they're guessing. A good survey includes thickness checks with calipers or gauges and a brief look at packers.

Myth: all low-E glass is the same

Some homeowners order "just replace the pane" and later notice the room feels brighter or darker, or the tint changed. Low-E coatings vary. Older units often used hard-coat low-E, which has a slight haze and high solar gain. Newer soft-coat low-E delivers better U-values with variable solar control. If you want the same light and heat balance, match the coating type and position within the cavity. If you want improvements, this is your chance to upgrade to a higher-spec coated glass, warm edge spacer, and argon. Good suppliers will print the specification on the order, not just "double glazed, clear."

When a full window replacement does make sense

Swapping sealed units is the default for sound frames. Full replacement earns its keep when:

- The frame is warped, rotten, or corroded, so it won't seal reliably even with new gaskets.
- The window lacks modern trickle vents where code requires them, and retrofitting vents is awkward or ugly.
- The property suffers severe condensation and poor air sealing overall, and a new frame with better compression seals will make a measurable difference.
- You want a different aesthetic or need to meet new safety egress sizes in bedrooms.
- The glazing system is obsolete and parts are unobtainable. Some 1990s proprietary bead styles fall into this bucket.

Before jumping to replacement, price both options. For many homes, 70 to 80 percent of the gain comes from upgrading the glass, not the frame.

Can you fix blown double glazing yourself?

Double Glazing Repairs

Short answer: sometimes, if you are handy and accept the risks. This is where "Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing" gets nuanced. Removing and refitting a beaded uPVC sash or a timber stop isn't rocket science, but there are traps:

- Safety glazing rules apply around doors, bathrooms, and low-level glass. Fitting non-toughened glass where toughened is required risks injury and violates regulations.
- Measuring wrong by even 2 millimetres can leave a unit loose or too tight. Too tight stresses the edge seal. Too loose forces thick gaskets or ugly silicone.

- Double glazed units are heavy and brittle at the edges. One slip can crack a corner, and the break may only show a day later as a wandering fissure.
- Without the right packers, you can cause sash drop, poor locking, or whistling drafts.

A competent DIYer with suction cups, glazing shovels, packers, and patience can replace a like-for-like unit in a simple beaded frame. Shop around for fabricators who sell single units to the public and will copy your spec. If you have any doubt about safety glass or tricky beads, bring in a fitter. The labour charge is modest compared to scrapping a new pane because it chips during install.

What a proper reglaze looks like

A clean process stands out. On site, the fitter protects floors, removes beads or stops without cracking them, and numbers them for reassembly. They lift out the old unit, note the packer layout, and clean the rebate. Drain paths get a poke and flush. New packers support the unit at quarter points and hinge corners on openers. The glass goes in square and centered with consistent gaskets. Beads snap back without forcing. Finally, they check the sash swings and locks smoothly. On timber, the installer primes raw rebates and beds the unit in appropriate sealant, letting it cure with spacers that prevent squeeze-out from smearing the sightline.

If the job takes five minutes, something got skipped. If it takes all day, something was wrong to begin with, like swollen timber or distorted sashes that needed correction.

About warranties and realistic expectations

Glazing warranties are a maze. Many sealed units come with 5 to 10 years against failure. Frames might carry longer structural warranties, but those rarely cover glass. Installers sometimes pass on the manufacturer's unit warranty, sometimes not. Keep paperwork. If the unit fails early, under about three years, push for a no-cost replacement. At seven or eight years, you might get partial goodwill at best.

If you're the second owner, check if warranties transfer. Many don't without formal notification. In some regions, building control sign-offs or installer scheme certificates (FENSA, CERTASS, etc.) live separately from glass warranties. Don't let an expired certificate deter necessary repairs. It has little bearing on your right to maintain or upgrade glazing later.

Upgrading while you're at it

A blown pane offers a chance to gain performance beyond the original spec:

- Warm edge spacers reduce the cold band near the frame and cut condensation risk on the inner pane by a noticeable margin.
- Higher-performance low-E coatings can drop U-values, sometimes from around 1.5 W/m²K to near 1.0, depending on unit thickness and gas fill.
- Laminated inner panes add security and sound control. They also block more UV, helping with fading fabrics.
- Thicker cavities, for instance moving from 16 mm to 18 or 20 where the frame allows, can improve insulation modestly. You must confirm the frame rebate and bead can accept the change.

Make sure these upgrades don't trip other issues. Heavier units put more strain on hinges in opening sashes. Very low solar gain coatings can make north rooms feel dim. Balance [Conservatory Repairs](#) the envelope across the house rather than creating a patchwork of radically different window behaviors.

A quick homeowner test before calling anyone

You can do a few checks to avoid wasted visits.

- Confirm the mist is inside the cavity. Clean both sides. If it wipes, it's surface condensation, which is a ventilation or humidity issue, not a blown unit.
- Look for the low-E side with a small flame reflection test. A faintly tinted or double-reflected flame can hint at a coated surface, useful information when matching.
- Measure visible glass and note the frame type, bead style, and any glazing bars inside the cavity.
- Take photos in good light that show the mist pattern and the window surroundings. Installers can spot drainage issues or warped beads from these.

Armed with details, you'll receive tighter quotes and avoid the catch-all recommendation to replace everything.

Cost traps and negotiation

The phrase "Double Glazing Repairs" attracts a wide range of companies, from single-van specialists to full replacement firms that would rather sell new frames. If the salesperson keeps pivoting to full windows when you only need a few units, try another outfit.

I've seen quote spreads of 2x for the same spec pane. Reasons vary: some fabricators buy units retail, some carry heavy overhead, some simply mark up because they can. Ask what spacer type, gas fill, glass brand, and coating you're getting. A vague "A-rated unit" tells you nothing. Clarity on spec makes price comparisons real and helps you avoid low-ball quotes that swap warm edge for aluminum spacers or omit gas filling.

Batching helps. If you have scattered failures, group them into one order. A fitter can pass on savings in travel and setup time. Also, request old units be removed from site and recycled where facilities exist. Most regions recycle glass and metal spacers.

When defogging is worth it

Despite my reservations, there are narrow cases where a defog service earns its keep:

- Historic or bespoke frames where bead removal risks damage and a full unit order has long lead times.
- Rental properties due for full refit within a year, where appearance beats performance until the bigger job.
- Triple glazed units in hard-to-source sizes where an interim clear view is needed while waiting.

Just get a written statement about expectations: cosmetic clarity, not restored insulation. And understand the risk of tiny drill holes becoming visible dots in raking light.

Maintenance that actually helps

You can't stop every failure, but you can stretch the clock.

- Keep drain holes clear. A vacuum nozzle and a cable tie as a probe work well.
- Avoid blasting seals with pressure washers. Rinse windows gently and keep the lance wide and off the beads.
- Check gaskets annually. Replace lengths that have shrunk at corners. It's a small cost that shields the unit edge from pooling water.
- Oil or adjust hinges so sashes close squarely. Twisted pressure on the unit edge shortens seal life.

- Manage indoor humidity. Extractor fans in kitchens and baths, and a dehumidifier in winter if you see surface condensation on inner panes.

These aren't glamorous tasks, but they slow the moisture assault at the exact place the unit is most vulnerable.

A short case study from the field

A 1998 bungalow I assessed had seven misted panes, all on the southwest front. The frames were uPVC in good shape but had clogged weep holes and shrunk gaskets. The owner expected a full window replacement quote north of five grand. We measured and ordered seven like-for-like IGUs, upgraded to warm edge spacers and a modern soft-coat low-E. Total cost landed just under 1,400, including fitting, new gaskets, and hinge adjustments on two openers.

Thermal camera images after installation showed a 2 to 3 degrees Celsius improvement at the glass center on a cold morning, and the owner's gas usage dropped about 8 percent over the next winter compared to prior bills, adjusted for degree days. Not a scientific lab trial, but consistent with what I've seen elsewhere. The frames are still in place, and the house looks fresher from the street without that telltale fog.

The bottom line on myths and facts

You don't need to live with misted panes, and you rarely need to throw out whole windows. Most blown units can be replaced cleanly within the existing frame at sensible cost, restoring clarity and much of the thermal performance. Defogging can buy time but won't recreate a sealed cavity. DIY is possible for straightforward beaded frames, but safety glass, accurate measuring, and correct packing are non-negotiable. If you upgrade when ordering, choose changes that fit the room's light, solar exposure, and hinge capacity rather than chasing the lowest U-value on paper.

If a salesperson leans hard into fear or insists that only complete replacement works, get another quote. Reputable firms that focus on Double Glazing Repairs will explain your options, show sample spacers and coatings, and leave you with a clear specification, not just a price. When you hear friends ask about Misted Double Glazing Repairs, you'll know the right questions to ask: is the frame sound, what's the exact unit spec, how will drainage be handled, and who will stand behind the work. That's how foggy mornings turn back into a plain view of the garden, without paying for more than you need.