

3 Smart Ways to Fix a Sunken Driveway Without Replacing It

If you're asking, "How do I fix an uneven driveway without replacing it," you're not alone, and you're asking the right question. Picture this: one slab of your driveway has dropped a full inch, so you call a few contractors. The first one walks the driveway, nods slowly, and hands you a quote for full replacement. You nearly choke. For most homeowners, that moment feels like the only option, but it rarely is. A 1-inch drop is often fixable depending on slab condition and how the concrete has cracked, and demolition is the last resort, not the starting point.

At Top Notch Mudjacking, we field calls about this exact situation every week across the Quad City area. The answer is almost always the same: the concrete can be saved, and the repair costs a fraction of replacement. This article walks through three proven professional methods for leveling a sunken driveway, covers a few DIY options for minor surface damage, and explains the specific signs that actually do mean it's time to replace. On a standard two-car driveway, the difference between mudjacking and full replacement alone can run \$3,000 to \$7,000, and knowing which path applies to your situation is how you keep that money in your pocket.

Why driveways sink and what that tells you about the fix

The soil beneath your slab is almost always the real culprit

Concrete doesn't sink on its own. The slab is only as stable as the soil beneath it, and that soil is constantly under pressure from water, weight, and temperature. Rain and snowmelt erode fine particles from the sub-base over time, leaving voids the concrete then settles into. Poor compaction during the original installation accelerates this process, because loosely packed fill compresses further under the slab's weight.

In Illinois and Iowa, the problem is made worse by two regional conditions. First, clay-heavy glacial soils dominate the Midwest. Clay absorbs moisture and swells, then shrinks during dry spells, creating movement that gradually destabilizes the base. Second, the freeze-thaw cycle that runs through every Quad Cities winter pushes soil up and pulls it back repeatedly, undermining the support layer season after season. These aren't cosmetic issues, they're structural ones, and a coat of sealer won't address the underlying soil movement.

Why diagnosing the cause matters before you pick a repair method

Two distinct problems can look similar from the driveway but require completely different fixes. The first is a slab that has settled due to soil movement beneath it. The concrete itself may still be in decent shape, but it's sitting lower than it should because the ground underneath has shifted. This requires a lifting method to push it back to grade. The second is a slab with surface wear, spalling, or hairline cracks that is still sitting level on a solid base. That problem calls for resurfacing, not lifting.

A quick field test helps you figure out which one you're dealing with. The best way to do this is to call us at Top Notch Mudjacking and we will come assess the problem. Step onto the sunken section and feel for any flex or bounce underfoot. Movement signals base failure. A slab that feels solid but just looks rough or cracked is a surface problem. Choosing the wrong repair method for the wrong problem is one of the most common ways homeowners waste money on driveways.

How do I fix an uneven driveway without replacing it? Start here

DIY fixes: when patching and crack filling are actually enough

Concrete patching and crack sealing for surface-level damage

If your concrete driveway is sitting level but has isolated cracks or small surface spalls, DIY patching is a legitimate option. For hairline cracks, a liquid crack filler or pourable concrete crack sealant works well. Wider gaps benefit from a backer rod placed in the lower portion of the crack, followed by a self-leveling polyurethane sealant on top. For shallow holes or spalled areas, a vinyl concrete patching compound applied with a trowel does the job.

One step that homeowners consistently skip is the bonding agent, and it's the one step that determines whether the patch holds. Apply bonding adhesive to the prepared area before placing any patch compound, or the repair will peel within a season or two. DIY patching buys time and stops water from infiltrating under the slab. It does not raise settled concrete, and it won't prevent further sinking if the base is compromised.

Asphalt cold patching and sealcoating

Asphalt driveways have their own DIY toolkit. Cold-patch asphalt mix handles small depressions and isolated potholes. Fill the area, overfill it slightly, then compact it firmly with a hand tamper. Asphalt crack filler addresses surface gaps. Once repairs have cured, a sealcoat application protects the whole surface and extends its life.

Professional asphalt patch jobs run about \$300 to \$3,000 depending on scope, which puts them in range for small isolated problems. The bottom line is the same as concrete: DIY makes sense for a hairline crack or a single small pothole on a structurally sound base. A slab that has visibly dropped, has widespread cracking, or bounces when you walk on it needs more than patching can offer.

Mudjacking: the most cost-effective way to fix an uneven driveway without replacing it

How the mudjacking process works step by step

Mudjacking is a proven [concrete lifting](#) method that has been used successfully for decades. The process starts with drilling small holes through the sunken slab at calculated points. A slurry made from cement, water, sand, and soil is then pumped under pressure through those holes to fill the voids beneath the concrete and generate upward lift. As the slurry fills the empty space and pressure builds, the slab rises back to its original grade. Once it's level, the drill holes are patched.

Most residential driveway jobs take a few hours from start to finish, not days. Light foot traffic is typically possible the same day, and you can drive on the repaired surface within 24 hours in most cases, though exact timing depends on slurry composition, weather, and your contractor's specific process. Patch holes are typically small and can be cosmetically subtle, though they may be visible on close inspection. A few hours of work, minimal disruption, and a driveway that sits level again.

Cost and lifespan: what mudjacking actually delivers

The cost gap is significant. [Mudjacking typically costs](#) \$3 to \$8 per square foot, while full concrete replacement generally runs \$15 to \$25 or more per square foot based on current market averages. A typical residential mudjacking project lands somewhere between \$800 and \$2,400 depending on driveway size and severity, compared to \$5,000 to \$10,000 or more for full replacement of the same area, a difference that adds up fast on a standard two-car driveway.

The honest tradeoff is that mudjacking isn't permanent. Under normal Midwest conditions, a mudjacked driveway lasts 5 to 10 years before the slab may settle again. For most homeowners, that's an excellent return on a repair that costs a fraction of replacement. If the root cause was an isolated drainage issue that has since been corrected, the repair can last considerably longer.

Why Quad Cities homeowners call Top Notch Mudjacking first

[Top Notch Mudjacking serves](#) residential, commercial, and industrial customers across the Quad Cities and surrounding communities in both Illinois and Iowa. That means homeowners in Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, Bettendorf, and nearby areas have a local specialist who understands how the region's clay soils and freeze-thaw cycles affect concrete performance over time.

Free estimates are available with no obligation. Whether you have a sunken driveway slab, a settling sidewalk, a dropped garage apron, or uneven steps, the estimate process takes the guesswork out of whether mudjacking is the right call for your specific situation. There's no cost to find out, which makes it the logical first step before committing to anything.

Polyurethane foam injection: when does the premium option make sense?

How foam injection differs from mudjacking

[Polyurethane foam injection](#), sometimes called polyjacking or foam lifting, uses the same general concept as mudjacking with a different material and a faster timeline. Contractors drill smaller holes than mudjacking requires and inject a two-part polyurethane foam beneath the slab. The foam expands as it reacts, fills voids, and lifts the concrete back into position. Once it hardens, which happens within minutes, the holes are sealed.

Because the foam cures so quickly, the slab is typically ready for traffic faster than with mudjacking. The foam material is also significantly lighter than the cement slurry used in mudjacking, which is sometimes cited as a disadvantage on slabs over especially soft or unstable soil, the lighter fill puts less additional load on the sub-base.

Cost vs. lifespan tradeoff for foam vs. mudjacking

Foam injection runs approximately \$5 to \$25 per square foot, compared to \$3 to \$8 for mudjacking. For a two-car driveway, that premium often adds \$1,500 to \$4,000 to the total project cost. In exchange for that higher upfront price, foam injection generally delivers some extended lifespan.

That tradeoff makes sense in specific situations. A homeowner who has already had mudjacking done once and wants a longer-lasting solution is a reasonable candidate for foam. So is a commercial property owner where speed of return to service is critical. For most residential driveways with standard settling from Midwest soil conditions, mudjacking's cost advantage is hard to beat on a repair. The right choice depends on your budget, your timeline, and how long you plan to stay in the home.

Resurfacing and overlay: repairing the surface, not the base

Concrete resurfacing for worn but level slabs

Concrete resurfacing applies a thin overlay of fresh material over an existing slab that is structurally sound but looks rough, pitted, or stained from years of use and winter salt damage. It will not lift a settled slab. Resurfacing is the right call when your driveway sits perfectly level but has widespread surface spalling, scaling, or cosmetic wear that makes it look far worse than it actually is.

Surface prep is the difference between a resurfacing job that lasts and one that peels off within a year. Cracks need to be filled, the surface must be clean and roughened for adhesion, and a bonding agent must go down before the resurfacer. Skip any of those steps and the overlay separates from the old slab, leaving you with a worse problem than you started with.

Asphalt overlay: a cost-effective surface refresh

Asphalt resurfacing lays a new layer of hot mix asphalt, typically 1.5 to 2 inches thick, over the existing surface. Cost runs about \$1.50 to \$4.00 per square foot, which is significantly less than

tearing out and repaving. When the base is structurally sound and the existing asphalt is just oxidized and worn, an overlay extends the driveway's life by years at a reasonable price.

The key limitation is straightforward: if the base has soft spots, drainage problems, or widespread alligator cracking, those issues telegraph through the new surface within a couple of seasons. Resurfacing is a refresh, not a structural repair. Applying a new layer over a failing foundation doesn't fix the foundation, it just delays the visible evidence of the problem while you spend money you can't get back.

When repair no longer makes sense: signs you need full replacement

Visual and structural damage thresholds

Most driveway damage is repairable, but some crosses a threshold where continued patching and lifting costs more over time than starting fresh. Watch for cracks wider than 1/4 inch running across multiple sections of the slab. Alligator or spiderweb cracking spreading across the surface signals that the base has moved in multiple directions and the slab has lost its structural integrity. Sections that flex or bounce underfoot confirm the sub-base has failed beneath them.

Damage covering more than 25 to 50 percent of the total driveway area also tips the scale toward replacement. When problems are that widespread, lifting or patching isolated sections doesn't resolve the underlying instability, it just temporarily addresses the most visible symptoms while others develop nearby.

Age, recurring repairs, and base failure as final indicators

A driveway older than 20 years that is showing multiple problems at once, cracks, spalling, settled sections, and drainage issues, has likely reached the end of its practical service life. Individual repair methods work because they solve isolated problems efficiently. When those problems appear everywhere, repair costs compound quickly without delivering lasting results.

Patches that keep failing in the same spot are another reliable signal. Recurring failure in the same location means the root cause, whether it's a drainage problem, a persistent void, or widespread sub-base deterioration, hasn't been addressed. At that point, continuing to repair is spending good money to delay the inevitable. The practical question isn't whether replacement is expensive; it's whether the cost of continued repairs over the next few years approaches the cost of replacement anyway.

The straightforward decision framework for fixing an uneven driveway

The choice breaks down by condition and budget. Use DIY patching for minor surface cracks and small isolated damage on a level slab. [Call a mudjacking specialist](#) for sunken sections

where the concrete itself is still in reasonable structural shape. Consider foam injection when you want a longer-lasting lift and have the budget for it. Choose resurfacing when the driveway is level but the surface is worn beyond the point where patching looks acceptable.

For most homeowners with a genuinely sunken driveway, mudjacking delivers the best combination of value, speed, and results. If you're still asking yourself, "How do I [fix an uneven driveway](#) without replacing it," the next step is a free estimate, not a commitment. In many cases, the slab can be saved, and a quick call to Top Notch Mudjacking tells you exactly where you stand before you spend a dime.