

Putty - Weather or Not

If leaded windows are installed as single-glazed windows exposed to the weather it's important to putty between the glass and the lead to eliminate drafts and prevent moisture from coming in. Today it's rare to install leaded windows exposed to the outdoors but more common to place them either sandwiched inside sealed units or on the interior of a building separate from a clear window. Such windows have no need for weatherproofing.

Not all glass is the same uniform thickness. Sometimes it's necessary to use lead came with a wide enough channel to accommodate the thickest glass, while leaving the thinner glass rattling loose in the came. Putty will eliminate this rattling. Most art glass today is relatively similar thickness and the majority of windows are of glass uniform enough that it all fits snugly into the lead. If the glass fits snugly enough to not rattle, there's no need to putty.

Many glass artisans argue that caulking a leaded window increases its strength. This is true, but only for a limited time. The increased strength lasts only as long as the putty is firmly bonded. It takes very little time for putty to dry and begin to crack. As soon as it cracks, it's no longer bonded and the strength gained is lost.

Leaded windows installed on passage doors, or exposed to the weather, should be sealed with putty. Others need not. If a window needs to be strengthened, it's better to add external reinforcement than to rely on putty.