Double glazed windows earn their keep quietly. They keep warmth in, noise out, and condensation off the glass. That is, until one morning you draw the blinds and see a blurry bloom between the panes. The view looks like someone smeared petroleum jelly inside the unit. You wipe the inside, then the outside, and it keeps coming back. That is the telltale sign of a blown double glazing unit.

I have fielded that call hundreds of times from homeowners. Some hope for a quick spray-and-wipe. Others brace for a full window replacement. The reality sits between those extremes, and it depends on age, construction, and how the failure shows up. If you understand what has failed and why, you can choose the right remedy, spend wisely, and regain clarity without wrecking the frames.

What “blown” actually means

Double glazing is two sheets of glass separated by a spacer, sealed around the edges, and filled with dry air or an inert gas such as argon. The edge seal is the hero here. It keeps moisture out and gas in. When that edge seal breaks down, moist air sneaks into the cavity. The internal desiccant inside the spacer does its best to soak it up, but once saturated, water vapour condenses on the cooler inner surfaces. That gives you streaks, fog, or full-on misting between the panes.

Blown does not mean broken in a safety sense. The glass can be intact and structurally sound. The failure is almost always a seal problem, sometimes aggravated by poor drainage in the frame or thermal stress. I have seen windows less than five years old fog because their weep holes were blocked by paint. I have also seen 20-year-old units remain crystal-clear because the frame kept water away from the seal.

The symptoms vary. Early on, you might see edge misting on cold mornings that clears by noon. Later, desiccant beads may appear as brown smears, and droplets linger for days. Some units show rainbow-like interference patterns, a sign that the cavity environment has changed. The glass can also feel colder to the touch on the inside pane because argon has escaped, reducing thermal performance.

Can you fix blown double glazing?

Strictly speaking, you cannot unboil the egg. Once the edge seal fails, you cannot restore the original hermetic conditions inside the cavity. What you can do is replace the sealed unit that sits in the frame, or in some limited cases, vent and dry the existing unit to limp along for a while. Choosing between those options is where good judgment matters.

Replacement of the sealed glass unit is the standard. The frame remains, whether it is uPVC, timber, or aluminum. A glazier measures precisely, orders a like-for-like insulated glass unit (IGU), and swaps it in. This is the most reliable way to restore appearance, energy performance, and warranty status.

Repair methods that promise to “clear your view without replacement” usually involve drilling tiny holes through the outer pane, flushing the cavity with dry air or alcohol, and adding a vent plug. If done with care, this can reduce misting for a time. It does not reseal the unit, and thermal performance will not fully recover. I have used this approach as a stopgap for windows due to be replaced in a couple of years, or when budget is tight and the frame is awkward. It is not a permanent cure.

There are edge cases. If the misting is actually on the room-side surface or the exterior due to humidity and temperature differences, there is nothing wrong with the seal. You do not “fix” those with glazing work. You

improve ventilation, reduce indoor humidity, or accept that efficient windows sometimes dew on the outside on crisp mornings because the outer pane is colder than the air.

How to tell if the seal has failed

You can do a quick diagnosis without special tools.

- If condensation is between the panes and you cannot wipe it off from either side, the unit is compromised. Morning sun that clears external condensation will not clear internal mist permanently.
- If you see dust or debris lines inside the cavity, the seal has been open for a while.
- If the spacer bar (the band around the glass edge) shows corrosion, staining, or a gap at a corner, that is a smoking gun.
- If energy bills ticked up and rooms feel draft-free but cooler near the glass, you might have gas loss even before visible misting.

When I inspect on site, I also check frame drainage and look for signs of movement. Settled sashes can twist the unit, overstressing the seal. Fresh silicone smeared over the perimeter usually means someone tried to fix it from the outside. That rarely helps because the seal failure is internal.

Why seals fail in the first place

Time and ultraviolet light gradually degrade sealants. Temperature swings pump the cavity through pressure cycles, especially in large south-facing panes. Poor manufacturing can leave gaps or under-cured beads. Installation matters too. A unit must sit on proper glazing blocks and not bear weight at the corners. I once replaced four fogged units at the seaside where the spacer sealant had failed early because salty moisture and wind-driven rain lived in the rebate due to missing drainage slots.

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Frames play a role. Timber frames that trap water can soak the edge. Aluminum frames without thermal breaks conduct cold into the seal. uPVC is forgiving, but paint or dirt blocking weep holes can leave standing water bathing the perimeter. The rule of thumb is simple: dry edges live longer.

Weighing your options: repair, replace the unit, or replace the window

For most homeowners, three paths exist, each with a cost range and a lifespan expectation.

Replace only the sealed unit. This is the bread and butter of Double Glazing Repairs. In the UK, for a standard casement size such as 600 by 900 millimetres, you might pay 80 to 180 pounds for a clear double-glazed replacement unit, installed. Toughened or laminated glass costs more, as do special coatings and shaped panes. Leaded or Georgian bars add time and cost. The result looks new and performs like new, assuming the frame is sound. You keep the original opening lights and furniture.

Attempt a misted double glazing repair by venting and drying. Expect pricing in the 40 to 90 pounds per pane range for basic defogging. You get your view back in many cases, but warranties rarely cover the longevity of the fix. In my experience, results last 6 months to 3 years, sometimes more in arid climates. If you are selling soon and want a disclosure-friendly fix, this can tide you over, but savvy surveyors know the difference.

Replace the entire window. This is sensible when frames are rotten, warped, or at end of life. If your windows are 25 years old, swapping a few units may be penny wise. A full replacement lets you upgrade to modern frames with better U-values, warm-edge spacers, trickle vents, and proper security hardware. Per opening, that might cost 400 to 1,200 pounds or more depending on size and material. You also refresh the look and perhaps add acoustic laminated glass if you live near traffic.

The installation choreography for a new unit

If you choose replacement, a competent installer will follow a rhythm that protects the frame and ensures the new unit lasts. The process rarely takes more than an hour per window once the glass is on site.

Measurements come first. We measure visible glass size, add allowances for the rebate, and note spacer thickness, glass specification, coatings, and any obscure patterns. One millimetre off can leave a rattle or a unit that will not seat. I always take measurements in at least three points per side in case the opening is out of square.

Ordering the unit involves specifying thickness. Most residential double glazing is 24 millimetres overall, often as 4-16-4 glass-spacer-glass. Variations exist such as 28 millimetres, acoustic 6 millimetre panes, or laminated security inner panes. Low-E coatings go on a specific surface inside the cavity, usually surface 3 for UK climates. Argon fill is common. Warm-edge spacers reduce the cold bridge at the perimeter.

On the day, we remove glazing beads carefully. uPVC beads pry out from the longest side first, using a stiff putty knife and packers to avoid gouges. Timber beads are cut free, sometimes replaced if they split. We lift out the old unit with suction cups. Then we check the sill for water, clear any blocked drainage slots, and add or adjust setting blocks. A unit must sit on blocks at quarter points along the bottom edge, not on sealant or directly on the frame.

The new unit goes in square. We check diagonals with a tape to be sure the sash is not twisting the glass. Packers keep the unit from walking as we tap the beads back in, usually top and sides first, then bottom. I caulk the outer mitres if needed, but avoid smothering the weep holes. Finally, I clean the glass with a non-ammonia cleaner to protect the soft coat.

What about warranties and building regulations?

If your windows are under warranty, contact the original installer. Many companies offer 5 to 10 years on the sealed units. Keep your paperwork. If the firm is defunct, a third-party insurance-backed warranty may still cover the unit, though claims can be a slog.

In the UK, replacing like-for-like sealed units does not typically trigger building control notification if frames remain. Upgrading to safety glass in critical locations is prudent and often required: within 800 millimetres of the floor, within 300 millimetres of a door edge, and in doors, glazing should be toughened or laminated. Any full window replacement should meet current U-value and ventilation standards. A FENSA or CERTASS installer can self-certify.

The claims and limits of defogging services

I have tried the drill-and-vent method on stubborn cases where budget could not stretch. The best results come on units that fog lightly and have intact outer coatings. The method goes like this: tiny holes in the outer pane near the top and bottom, a purge of desiccated air or alcohol to absorb moisture, then a micro valve or plug. Sunshine does the rest, wicking moisture out over days.

Where it fails is important to understand. If the low-E coating is damaged, the window can show blotches. If the spacer desiccant has migrated into the cavity, you can end up with streaks that never leave. Thermal performance remains compromised because the cavity gas mix is no longer controlled. And from a resale perspective, many surveyors list defogged units as “requires long-term replacement.” In short, use this for Misted Double Glazing Repairs when appearance is the priority for a limited period, not when performance and longevity matter.

Energy and comfort impact of a blown unit

A sealed double-glazed unit with a low-E coating and argon fill can have a centre-of-glass U-value around 1.1 to 1.2 W/m^{2}K. Lose the gas and compromise the cavity, and you drift up toward 1.6 to 1.8. One or two failed units in

a typical semi will not double your heating bill, but you will feel cool radiation near the glass on winter evenings. The perimeter becomes the weak link, and you may see surface condensation form on the inner pane because it runs colder. Bedrooms with high humidity suffer most.

Homeowners sometimes hope that a dehumidifier will fix the fogging. It will not, because the moisture is inside the sealed space. That said, reducing indoor humidity to the 45 to 55 percent range goes a long way to preventing surface condensation on otherwise healthy windows. Trickle vents, cooker hoods that vent outside, and short sharp purges of fresh air help far more than keeping windows constantly on the latch.

When to upgrade instead of matching like-for-like

If you are replacing several blown units, pause and review your glass spec. Two common upgrades repay their small premiums.

Low-iron glass on the outer pane improves clarity on large picture windows, particularly where you have pale render or sea views that can look green through standard float. The upcharge is modest.

Acoustic laminated glass on the inner pane helps on roads with steady traffic hum. A 6.8 laminated inner pane paired with a 4 millimetre outer and a 16 millimetre spacer creates a good sound dampening asymmetry. The weight increases, so check hinges and balance springs.

Warm-edge spacers and deeper cavities make a noticeable difference near radiators and sofas. A 16 millimetre cavity outperforms a 12 millimetre one, but beyond 20 millimetres, you see diminishing returns as convection sets in. Many modern IGUs aim for 16 to 18 millimetres with argon or 12 millimetres with krypton for narrow sashes.

Solar control coatings matter for south and west aspects. If your lounge cooks in summer, ask for a moderate solar factor coating so you reflect a slice of that heat while keeping winter gains. The glass industry has trade names for these; your installer should translate them into visible light transmission and g-value numbers so you know what you are buying.

Safety glazing: a quiet non-negotiable

Every year I encounter at least one home where a failed unit near the floor was replaced with ordinary annealed glass, usually by a handyman. It looks fine until a child trips. Safety glazing is not optional in critical locations. Toughened or laminated glass costs more, but not by enough to justify risk. Bathrooms, doors, side panels, and low-level glazing must meet safety standards. If in doubt, ask for a stamp on the corner that shows compliance.

Common pitfalls I see on callouts

Three mistakes come up repeatedly, each easy to avoid.

Homeowners measure bead to bead and order glass too small. The result is a unit that floats with large gaps, bridged by sealant. It can flex and fail early. Measure the visible glass, add the correct rebate depth for your frame system, and account for packers.

Blocked drainage. Painters love tidy lines and sometimes caulk across the weep slots. Those slots are there to evacuate water that inevitably gets past gaskets. Keep them open. A simple pipe cleaner or a quick check after storms makes a difference.

Overpacking. Installers sometimes stuff so many packers in that the sash twists, or they place packs at the corners. Weight at the corners is a recipe for stress fractures. Pack at quarter points, match packer hardness to the frame

type, and allow gaskets to compress evenly.

Can you do it yourself?

Swapping a unit is feasible for a careful DIYer, especially in uPVC frames with clip-in beads. The risks are dropping the glass, damaging beads, or nicking gaskets that are no longer available on older systems. Timber beading can splinter, and putty lines demand a steady hand. If you do try, wear gloves, use suction cups, and have a second person on hand for larger panes.

If your home is above ground floor or the unit is heavy, get a pro. A 1.2 by 1.2 metre laminated unit is surprisingly heavy, and wrestling it out of a first-floor opening is not a learning opportunity you want.

When mist is not a glazing problem at all

Before you schedule Double Glazing Repairs, make sure the fog is not simple surface condensation. Kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms often push humidity up in winter. If the fog wipes off, the double glazing is likely fine. Cold bridges around frames or missing trickle vents can be the culprit. Curtains pulled tight create cold microclimates at the glass where moisture condenses overnight. Leaving a small gap at the top of curtains, adding a thermal break strip, or venting briefly after showers and cooking can resolve the issue.

External condensation on high-performance glass confuses people too. Step outside on a clear, still morning and you might see beads of water on the outer pane while the neighbor’s older window stays dry. That is the low-E coating doing its job, radiating less heat outward so the outer pane runs cooler and dips below the dew point. It evaporates as the air warms.

A realistic path to clear, efficient windows again

If several windows are misted and the frames are sound, plan a batch of sealed unit replacements. You will get better pricing and a consistent appearance. Ask for low-E with warm-edge spacers and argon as a baseline. If you are near a busy road, enquire about acoustic options for the noisiest elevations. Verify safety glazing where required. Get a written spec, not just “double glazed.”

If just one small unit is fogged and budget is tight, a defogging service can offer breathing room. Go in with eyes open and accept that it is a cosmetic, temporary measure. Keep an eye on frame drainage and humidity so you do

not accelerate a repeat.

If frames are past it, stop throwing good money after bad. A full window replacement is a bigger ticket, but it resolves drafts, improves security, and lifts thermal performance across the board. Time it for shoulder seasons so you are not freezing during installation.

Costs, timelines, and what to expect

From first measure to install, expect 5 to 15 working days depending on glass complexity and supplier lead times. Toughened and laminated units take longer because they must be heat treated or laminated after cutting. On the day, a two-person crew can swap 6 to 12 units if access is straightforward.

Costs vary by region. In many UK towns, simple casement units sit in the 80 to 150 pound installed range per opening for common sizes, with picture windows scaling up. Bay and bow windows are their own beast due to angles and load distribution. Do not be shy about asking a fitter to show spacer labels on delivery that confirm the spec you agreed.

Aftercare that actually helps

Most sealed units are maintenance-light, but a few habits extend their life.

Keep weep holes clear. A quick seasonal check with a cotton bud or bicycle spoke avoids standing water.

Avoid pressure washing directly at window perimeters. Water forced into gaskets can find its way behind seals.

If you repaint timber frames, leave a hairline gap at the bottom bead to allow drainage, and do not seal over weep slots. Use a breathable primer and avoid trapping moisture inside the rebate.

Do not apply aftermarket reflective films to low-E double glazing unless the film manufacturer explicitly warrants it for that glass type. Some films increase heat build-up and can cause thermal fracture.

A quick checklist before you call

- Can you wipe the condensation from either side, or is it inside the cavity?
- Are the frames in good condition, and do the weep holes drain freely?
- Do you need safety glass where the unit sits?
- Is there value in upgrading to acoustic, solar, or low-iron glass for this opening?
- Do you have paperwork that might cover the unit under warranty?

Armed with those answers, a glazier can quote accurately, and you can decide whether to *Conservatory Repairs* repair or replace. The phrase Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing suggests a yes-or-no question. The practical answer is yes, you can fix the problem your eyes see by replacing the failed sealed unit, and in the short term you can sometimes improve the view by venting and drying. The right choice depends on budget, frame condition, and how long you plan to stay. Get those pieces aligned, and you will be looking through clear, efficient windows again without drama.