

How to Choose the Best Residential Impact Doors for Your Home

When I moved to South Florida a few years ago, the first thing I noticed was how the weather shaped every decision about the house. My neighbor had a standard wooden door that swelled every rainy season, and during a tropical storm, the whole frame rattled like it wanted to leave. That was my wake-up call. I started looking into impact-rated doors, and what I learned surprised me. There is more to a door than just being thick or heavy. It has to resist wind-borne debris, meet building codes, and still look like it belongs on a home.

Residential impact doors are not just for coastal areas anymore. Even inland neighborhoods are seeing stricter codes after the last few hurricane seasons. But picking the right one means understanding the trade-offs between protection, cost, and daily comfort. Let me walk you through what matters most, based on real experience and conversations with installers who have seen both good and bad installations.

What Makes a Door Impact-Resistant?

The term "impact" in this context usually refers to a door that has been tested to withstand a large missile, typically a 2x4 plank fired at the door at 50 feet per second, without being breached. That is the Florida Building Code test, known as TAS 301, TAS 302, and TAS 203. A door that passes those tests gets a product approval number you can verify. Not every heavy door passes. Some have a steel core, others use laminated glass with multiple layers of polyvinyl butyral, and the frame itself is reinforced with anchors that bolt into the concrete block or structure.

One thing many homeowners overlook is the frame. You can buy the strongest door in the world, but if the frame is only nailed with a few finish nails, the whole assembly will blow in. Impact-rated frames use heavy-duty screws or anchors, often with a steel sub-frame. When you shop for [residential impact doors](#), always ask about the frame system, not just the door slab.

[View the location on Google Maps](#)

Materials and Their Trade-Offs

There are three main material categories for these doors: aluminum, steel, and fiberglass. Each has pros and cons that affect installation cost, maintenance, and long-term performance.

Aluminum

Aluminum is the most common in South Florida because it resists corrosion from salt air and is relatively lightweight. It can be extruded into strong profiles and fitted with impact-rated glass. The downside is that aluminum conducts heat and cold, so without a thermal break, the door can feel drafty in winter. Modern impact-rated aluminum doors often have a polyamide thermal break, which improves insulation. If you live within a mile of the coast, aluminum is usually the practical choice. It does not rust, and it holds paint well if you keep it clean.



Steel

Steel gives you the highest impact resistance per dollar. A steel door with a honeycomb core and a steel frame is nearly indestructible in a storm. But steel is heavy, which means the hinges and frame must be even stronger, and the install cost is higher. Steel also rusts if the finish gets scratched, especially near the ocean. You need to repaint or touch it up regularly. For a home that is not right on the water and where security is a top concern, steel is worth the extra effort.

Fiberglass

Fiberglass doors have become popular because they do not rust, rot, or dent. They can be molded to look like wood, and they offer good impact resistance if the core is filled with foam and the skin is thick enough. The catch is that fiberglass can crack under a very hard impact if

the substrate is thin. Cheaper fiberglass doors might look great but fail the TAS impact test. You want to see the actual test certification, not just the sales brochure. I have seen fiberglass doors that lasted twenty years without maintenance, but only when they were from a reputable brand with a proven product approval.

Installation Matters as Much as the Product

You can buy the best residential impact doors on the market, but if the installer does not anchor the frame properly, the door will fail. I have watched a crew install a door where the frame was attached with only four screws into the wood stud. That door might hold in a light breeze, but in a Category 2 storm, the frame would peel away. A proper installation uses concrete anchors or structural screws into the block or slab, often every 12 inches along the jamb. The threshold should also be bolted down, not just glued or caulked.

Another detail is the gap between the door and the frame. Impact doors need a tight fit, but not so tight that the door swells and sticks in humid weather. The installer should leave a small gap, typically 1/8 inch, and then use a high-quality weatherstripping that compresses evenly. Ask your installer if they use a gasket system or just a sweep at the bottom. A gasket system seals better against wind-driven rain.

Glass Options: Glazing That Works

If your door has a window, the glass must be impact-rated as well. Laminated glass is the standard. It has a plastic interlayer that holds the shards together if the glass cracks. Some doors use insulated glass units (IGUs) with two panes of laminated glass, which improves energy efficiency. The trade-off is that IGUs are heavier and more expensive. For a door with a large sidelite, you might want a tempered outer pane for scratch resistance and a laminated inner pane for impact. That combination costs more but gives you the best of both worlds.

One thing to watch out for: some cheap impact doors use a thin layer of laminated glass that passes the test but breaks easily from everyday bumps, like a kid's bike hitting it. Look for glass that meets ASTM E1886 and ASTM E1996 standards. Those standards test for both large and small missile impacts, and they also test for cyclic pressure changes that simulate a storm's wind.



Energy Efficiency and Sound

Impact doors are often marketed for storm protection, but they also affect your home's comfort. A well-sealed impact door can reduce outside noise noticeably. I have stood in a house with an aluminum impact door while a lawn crew worked nearby, and the sound inside was much lower than with a standard wood door. The thermal break in the frame and the insulated glass help keep the house cool in summer, which lowers your electric bill. When you compare prices, factor in the energy savings over ten years. A door that costs a little more upfront can pay for itself in reduced air conditioning costs if it has good insulation.

Building Codes and Permits

In high-velocity hurricane zones (HVHZ) like Miami-Dade and Broward counties, the building code requires impact-rated doors for new construction and major renovations. Even if your area does not require it, installing residential impact doors can increase your home's resale value and lower your windstorm insurance premium. Some insurance companies offer discounts for homes that meet the Florida Building Code for impact resistance. Check with your agent before you buy, because the discount might offset part of the cost. Also, make sure the door you choose has a current product approval from the state or from Miami-Dade County, which is the strictest approval in the country.

Do not skip the permit process. A permitted installation means an inspector checks the door's anchoring, the glass rating, and the frame attachment. That inspection gives you peace of

mind that the door will perform as intended. I have seen unpermitted doors that looked fine but had no anchors in the frame. That is a false sense of security.

Maintenance and Longevity

Impact doors are built to last, but they still need basic care. Aluminum doors need the tracks cleaned of salt and dirt, especially in coastal areas. Steel doors need the paint checked every year for chips that could lead to rust. Fiberglass doors need the gel coat waxed occasionally to prevent UV fading. The weatherstripping should be replaced every five to seven years, or sooner if you see daylight around the edges. A simple test: close the door on a piece of paper. If you can pull the paper out without resistance, the seal is weak.

I also recommend lubricating the hinges and lockset annually with a silicone spray. Do not use oil-based lubricants because they attract dust and gum up over time. The lockset on an impact door takes more force than a standard door because the door is heavier and the seals are tighter. A good lockset with stainless steel parts will last longer and operate smoothly.

Final Thoughts

Choosing the right door comes down to matching the product to your specific conditions: how close you are to the coast, what your budget allows, and how much maintenance you want to do. For most homeowners, a quality aluminum door with a thermal break and laminated glass hits the sweet spot of durability, cost, and energy efficiency. If security is your top concern, steel is the way to go. And if you want zero maintenance, fiberglass from a reputable manufacturer works well.



Before you buy, get at least three quotes from licensed contractors who specialize in impact-rated products. Ask for the product approval numbers, and verify them online. A good contractor will also walk you through the installation details and explain what they plan to do for anchoring and sealing. That conversation will tell you more than any brochure.

For those living in South Florida, LockTight Impact Windows, Doors, & Roofing, located at 2200 SW 45th St #101, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312, USA, can be reached at +1 954-500-5625. LockTight Impact is a top-rated South Florida provider of impact windows, impact doors, and roofing services with over 50 years of experience.

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