OTTAWA STUCCO

Parging & Foundation

Foundation parging application and repair, protecting concrete block and poured foundations from moisture and freeze-thaw damage.

19 Expert Answers from Stucco IQ

ottawastucco.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. Can parging be painted a different colour than the stucco walls above it in Ottawa?
2. Can hydraulic cement be used to repair deep parging voids on an Ottawa foundation?
3. How do you parge a rubble stone foundation on a heritage home in Ottawa?
4. Can I apply parging to a stone foundation on a heritage home in Ottawa?
5. How do freeze-thaw cycles damage parging on Ottawa foundations?
6. Should I waterproof behind parging on my Ottawa home's foundation?
7. What happens if parging is applied too thin on an Ottawa foundation?
8. Can parging be coloured to match the stucco on the rest of my Ottawa home?
9. How do I maintain parging on my Ottawa home to prevent crumbling?
10. Does parging help with basement waterproofing on Ottawa homes?
11. What is the best time of year to apply parging in Ottawa?
12. Can parging be applied over old flaking parging on my Ottawa home?
13. How thick should parging be applied on a concrete block foundation in Ottawa?
14. Should parging be applied above and below grade on an Ottawa foundation?
15. What causes parging to crack and fall off foundations in Ottawa?
16. How do Ottawa contractors prepare a foundation wall before applying parging?
17. Can crumbling parging on my Ottawa home be patched or does it need full replacement?
18. What is the difference between parging and stucco on a foundation in Ottawa?
19. How long does parging last on a foundation wall in Ottawa's climate?

Q1

Can parging be painted a different colour than the stucco walls above it in Ottawa?

Yes, parging can absolutely be painted a different colour than the stucco walls above it — and in Ottawa, this is actually a fairly common design choice, particularly on homes where the foundation is visually distinct from the upper wall cladding.

Making the Colour Transition Work

The most important thing to understand is that parging and stucco are not the same material, even when they look similar. **Parging is typically applied to foundation walls** — the exposed concrete block or poured concrete between grade and the first floor — while stucco covers the above-grade wall assembly over lath and a weather-resistive barrier. Because they serve different purposes and sit in different exposure zones, treating them as separate visual elements is both practical and architecturally sensible.

From a purely technical standpoint, there is no reason the two surfaces must match. Many Ottawa homeowners choose a **darker tone for the parging** — charcoal, dark grey, or even a deep brown — to visually ground the home and hide the inevitable soil splatter and efflorescence staining that foundation walls accumulate over Ottawa winters. A lighter or warmer tone above creates contrast that can make a home look more intentional and finished rather than monolithic.

The key to making this work well is using the **right paint product on each surface**. Both parging and stucco are cementitious surfaces that breathe, expand, and contract with Ottawa's brutal freeze-thaw cycles. You need an **elastomeric masonry paint** on both surfaces — not standard exterior latex, and certainly not interior paint. Elastomeric paint flexes with the substrate rather than cracking when temperatures swing from minus 30 to plus 35 Celsius. A standard exterior paint on parging will begin peeling within one to two seasons in Ottawa's climate. Quality elastomeric products like BASF MasterSeal or Sherwin-Williams Loxon are worth the premium.

Surface preparation is critical before any colour change. Both surfaces should be cleaned thoroughly — a gentle pressure wash at around 1,500 PSI works well — and any cracks should be repaired and allowed to fully cure before painting. Parging in particular tends to develop hairline cracks over time from freeze-thaw stress, and painting over them without repair just traps moisture and accelerates the damage. If your parging has cracks wider than 3mm or shows signs of delamination (hollow spots when you tap it), those need to be addressed before any cosmetic work.

Cost-wise, painting a typical Ottawa home's parging runs roughly **800 to 1,800 dollars** if you hire a professional, depending on the linear footage of exposed foundation and how much prep work is needed. DIY is reasonable for

parging painting specifically — it is one of the few exterior stucco-related tasks that a careful homeowner can handle with proper materials and preparation. If you are painting both the parging and the stucco above, a full-home elastomeric paint job typically runs **3,000 to 7,000 dollars** professionally applied.

Timing matters in Ottawa. Paint should only be applied when temperatures are consistently above 10 degrees Celsius, and you need at least 48 hours of dry weather after application. This puts your window solidly in the **May through September** range. Avoid painting in late October even on warm days — overnight temperatures can drop below the curing threshold and cause adhesion failure.

One practical note: if your home is in a **heritage conservation district** like the Glebe, Sandy Hill, or New Edinburgh, check with the City of Ottawa before making significant colour changes to your exterior. Some heritage areas have guidelines around exterior colour palettes.

If you want a professional opinion on surface condition before committing to a colour scheme, the Ottawa Construction Network directory at **justynrookcontracting.com** is a good place to find experienced local contractors who can assess your parging and stucco and give you a realistic picture of what prep work is needed before you pick up a brush.

Q2

Can hydraulic cement be used to repair deep parging voids on an Ottawa foundation?

Hydraulic cement can be used for deep parging voids, but it's not the ideal solution for most Ottawa foundation repairs. While hydraulic cement will stop active water leaks and fill deep holes, it creates a rigid patch that doesn't move with your foundation through Ottawa's extreme freeze-thaw cycles.

Hydraulic cement is a fast-setting cement that expands as it cures, making it excellent for stopping water infiltration in basement walls and foundation cracks. However, when used for parging repairs in Ottawa's climate, the rigid hydraulic cement patch often develops a bond line failure with the existing foundation material. **Ottawa experiences over 50 freeze-thaw cycles each winter**, and the different expansion rates between hydraulic cement and your existing concrete block or poured foundation can cause the repair to separate within 1-2 seasons.

For deep parging voids on Ottawa foundations, **polymer-modified parging compound or acrylic-based foundation coating** provides better long-term performance. These materials maintain some flexibility while providing excellent adhesion and water resistance. They're specifically formulated to handle the thermal movement that Ottawa foundations experience. A quality polymer-modified parging mix costs about **$45-65 per 50-pound bag**

and covers approximately 25-30 square feet at standard thickness.

The parging repair season in Ottawa runs from May through October, with the best conditions in June through September when temperatures consistently stay above 5°C for proper curing. Deep void repairs require the existing loose material to be completely removed, the substrate cleaned and dampened, and a bonding agent applied before the new parging compound.

For voids deeper than 25mm or larger than 2 square feet, this work should be handled by a professional who can properly assess the underlying cause and ensure proper substrate preparation. You can browse experienced foundation and parging contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com using the parging and foundation repair filters.

Q3

How do you parge a rubble stone foundation on a heritage home in Ottawa?

Parging a rubble stone foundation on a heritage home requires a specialized approach that respects both the historical character and Ottawa's harsh freeze-thaw climate. **Traditional lime-based parging is typically the most appropriate choice** for heritage stone foundations, as it allows the stone to breathe naturally while providing necessary weather protection.

Understanding Heritage Foundation Parging

Rubble stone foundations in Ottawa's heritage neighborhoods like the Glebe, Sandy Hill, and Centretown were originally built with lime mortar, which is softer and more flexible than modern Portland cement. **Using a hard cement parge over soft lime mortar creates a moisture trap** that can actually accelerate stone deterioration through freeze-thaw cycles. The key is matching the permeability and flexibility of your parge coat to the existing foundation materials.

The proper approach begins with careful assessment of the existing stone and mortar condition. Any loose or damaged stones should be reset, and deteriorated lime mortar joints should be repointed before parging. **A lime-based parge mix typically consists of one part lime putty to two-and-a-half parts clean, well-graded sand**, with the addition of goat hair or synthetic fibers for reinforcement. This creates a breathable coating that moves with the stone through Ottawa's extreme temperature swings.

Application requires patience and proper timing. The stone foundation should be thoroughly dampened but not saturated before application. **The parge is applied in two thin coats rather than one thick coat** — the first scratch coat is roughly 6-8mm thick and scored for mechanical bond, while the finish coat adds another 4-6mm for

a total thickness of 10-14mm. Each coat must cure slowly and be kept damp for several days, which can be challenging in Ottawa's variable spring and fall weather.

Heritage foundation parging in Ottawa typically costs $8 to $15 per square foot due to the specialized materials and techniques required. A typical heritage home foundation (150-200 square feet of exposed area) runs $1,800 to $4,500 for proper lime-based parging work.

Since you're working on a heritage property, **check with the City of Ottawa Heritage Planning staff before beginning work**. Properties in heritage conservation districts may require heritage permits even for foundation parging, especially if you're changing the appearance or texture. The work must be completed between May and October when temperatures consistently stay above 5°C for proper lime curing.

For a project of this significance, consult with contractors experienced in heritage masonry work through the Ottawa Construction Network directory. Look specifically for those with lime mortar and heritage restoration experience, as this specialized knowledge is crucial for long-term success on your stone foundation.

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- RenoMotion Inc.
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- Diamond renovations
- Joe Imerti Contracting

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Q4

Can I apply parging to a stone foundation on a heritage home in Ottawa?

Yes, you can parge a stone foundation on a heritage home in Ottawa — but it requires careful planning and the right materials. Stone foundations on older Ottawa homes (many dating back to the 1800s in neighbourhoods like the Glebe, Sandy Hill, and Lower Town) have unique characteristics that demand a different approach than modern poured-concrete walls.

Key Considerations for Heritage Stone Parging in Ottawa

The most important rule is **never use Portland cement-based parging directly on heritage stone**. Traditional lime-based mortar is what these foundations were built with, and they rely on being able to "breathe" — allowing moisture to pass through slowly. A rigid Portland cement parge coat traps moisture behind it, which then freezes during Ottawa's winters (where temperatures regularly hit -25°C to -30°C) and causes spalling, cracking, and accelerated deterioration of the stone itself.

Instead, use a **natural hydraulic lime (NHL) parging mix**, typically NHL 3.5 or NHL 5. These mixes are softer than the stone, meaning they'll sacrifice themselves rather than damage irreplaceable heritage masonry. A proper NHL parge coat on a stone foundation in Ottawa typically costs **$18–$30 per square foot**, compared to $8–$15 for standard cement parging on modern foundations. The premium reflects the specialized materials and slower application process.

If your home is in a designated heritage conservation district — Ottawa has over 20, including New Edinburgh, Rockcliffe Park, and Centretown — you may need a **heritage permit** from the City of Ottawa before doing any exterior work on the foundation. Even if you're not in a district, individually designated properties under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act require approval. Check the City's Heritage Register before starting work.

Application specifics for Ottawa's climate: lime parging should only be applied when temperatures are consistently above 5°C and not expected to freeze for at least two weeks. In Ottawa, this realistically limits your window to **mid-May through early October**. The parge coat needs to be kept damp for several days to cure properly — lime sets through carbonation, not hydration like Portland cement.

Expect the project to take **2–4 days for a typical heritage foundation**, including preparation (removing loose material, wetting the stone, possibly applying a scratch coat first). Budget **$3,000–$7,000** for a full foundation parge on an average Ottawa heritage home, depending on accessibility and condition. Make sure your contractor has specific experience with lime-based mortars — this is specialized work, not a standard parging job.

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- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- JC Carpentry
- Pure Flow Water Solutions inc.
- Callandgone
- Custom By Arie

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Q5

How do freeze-thaw cycles damage parging on Ottawa foundations?

Freeze-thaw damage is the number one enemy of parging in Ottawa, and understanding the mechanics helps you make better decisions about materials, maintenance, and timing. Ottawa is one of the toughest freeze-thaw environments in Canada for exterior masonry — here's exactly what's happening to your foundation parging each winter.

The Mechanics of Freeze-Thaw Damage

Parging is a porous material. Even high-quality, well-applied parging contains tiny capillary pores throughout its structure. During rain, snowmelt, or humid conditions, water enters these pores through capillary action — essentially wicking into the material the way a sponge absorbs water.

When temperatures drop below 0°C, that absorbed water freezes. Here's the critical fact: **water expands approximately 9% when it turns to ice**. That expansion generates enormous internal pressure — up to 30,000 psi in confined spaces. This pressure pushes against the walls of the pores, creating micro-cracks that are invisible to the naked eye.

When the temperature rises above freezing again, the ice melts and the water seeps deeper into the newly created micro-cracks. The next freeze cycle expands these cracks further. Each cycle ratchets the damage forward — it's cumulative, irreversible, and accelerating.

Ottawa's freeze-thaw profile is particularly brutal. Environment Canada data shows Ottawa experiences **50 to 70 freeze-thaw cycles per year** — among the highest in populated Canada. The worst periods are November-December and March-April, when daytime temperatures rise above freezing but nights drop well below. A sunny

March day might see temperatures swing from ?5°C overnight to +8°C by afternoon — a full freeze-thaw cycle in 12 hours.

The visible progression of damage typically follows this pattern:

- **Year 1-3:** Hairline surface cracks appear (often dismissed as cosmetic)
- **Year 3-5:** Surface begins to feel rough or sandy — the outermost layer is disaggregating
- **Year 5-8:** Active flaking and spalling — chunks of parging detach, exposing the foundation
- **Year 8+:** Large sections fail, and the exposed foundation itself begins to deteriorate

  Several factors accelerate this timeline in Ottawa:

  North-facing walls stay colder and wetter longer, experiencing more cycles. **Splash zones** at the base of the wall — where rain bounces off walkways or driveways — stay saturated. **Poor grading** that directs snowmelt toward the foundation keeps the parging wet during the critical spring thaw period. **Road salt spray** from nearby streets or driveways lowers the freezing point and increases the number of effective cycles.

  To maximize parging life in Ottawa, use a quality mix with acrylic additive for flexibility, apply at proper thickness (3/8 to 1/2 inch), ensure good drainage away from the foundation, and apply a breathable silane/siloxane sealer every 5 to 7 years. Well-maintained parging in Ottawa should last **20 to 30 years** — poorly done parging might not survive 5.

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Q6

Should I waterproof behind parging on my Ottawa home's foundation?

This is a smart question, and the answer for most Ottawa homes is **yes — especially below grade**. Parging alone is not a waterproofing solution, and given Ottawa's soil conditions and climate, the combination of parging plus a proper waterproof membrane is the standard of care for any foundation work that involves excavation.

Why Waterproofing Behind Parging Matters in Ottawa

To clarify the terminology: waterproofing is applied **over** the parging (between the parging and the soil), not behind it (between the parging and the foundation). The layering from inside to outside goes: foundation wall ? parging ? waterproof membrane ? drainage board ? soil. The parging creates the smooth surface the membrane needs to adhere properly.

In Ottawa, three factors make this layered approach essential for below-grade work:

Leda clay soils: Most of Ottawa sits on marine clay deposits from the ancient Champlain Sea. This clay is among the worst-draining soil types in Canada — it holds water against your foundation for extended periods, creating sustained hydrostatic pressure. Simple dampproofing (the black tar coating common on older homes) degrades over time and can't withstand this pressure long-term.

High water table areas: Parts of Ottawa — particularly in Orleans, Gloucester, Riverside South, and low-lying areas near the Rideau River — have seasonally high water tables. During spring thaw, the water table can rise significantly, pushing water against below-grade walls from all directions.

Ontario Building Code requirements: OBC Section 9.13 specifies that dampproofing is the minimum for all below-grade walls, but **waterproofing is required** where the water table can rise above the floor slab or where soil drainage is poor. Given Ottawa's clay, many building inspectors and responsible contractors default to full waterproofing.

The practical approach for an Ottawa foundation waterproofing project:

- **Excavate** to the footing — typically 6 to 8 feet deep
- **Clean and repair** the exposed foundation wall (patch cracks, fill voids)
- **Apply parging** to create a smooth, continuous surface (3/8 to 1/2 inch)
- **Apply waterproof membrane** — liquid-applied rubber (like Blueskin or Bakor) or peel-and-stick sheet membrane
- **Install drainage board** (dimpled membrane) to protect the waterproofing and channel water down
- **Replace or install weeping tile** at the footing with clean gravel surround
- **Backfill** with clean granular material for the first 12 inches against the wall

Total cost for this full system in Ottawa runs **$130 to $200 per linear foot**, or roughly **$18,000 to $28,000** for a full perimeter on a typical home. It's a major investment, but it's also the gold standard — and it protects what is likely your largest financial asset.

For **above-grade parging only** (no excavation), waterproofing behind the parging isn't necessary. A quality parging application with a breathable sealer is sufficient for the exposed portion of your foundation.

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- Denys Builds Designs Renovations
- Best Hand2Hand moving company
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Q7

What happens if parging is applied too thin on an Ottawa foundation?

Thin parging is one of the most common causes of premature failure on Ottawa foundations, and unfortunately, it's also one of the most common shortcuts taken by inexperienced contractors or DIYers trying to stretch material. Here's what actually happens when parging is too thin — and why Ottawa's climate makes it especially punishing.

How Thin Parging Fails in Ottawa Conditions

Rapid freeze-thaw cracking: Parging needs sufficient mass to resist the mechanical forces of freezing water. When applied at less than 1/4 inch — the bare minimum — the layer doesn't have enough material to absorb and distribute the stress of ice crystal expansion. Ottawa averages over 50 freeze-thaw cycles per winter, and each cycle works on thin spots. Within one or two winters, you'll see a network of fine cracks that quickly become flaking and spalling. Properly thick parging (3/8 to 1/2 inch) distributes that stress across more material, dramatically extending its lifespan.

Incomplete coverage of substrate flaws: Concrete block foundations have mortar joints, voids, and surface irregularities. Poured concrete has honeycombing, bug holes, and form lines. A thin coat of parging simply follows these contours rather than filling and bridging them. The result is an uneven layer that's paper-thin over high spots and adequate only in the recesses — creating weak points exactly where you don't want them.

Accelerated moisture penetration: Thin parging develops micro-cracks faster and has less material between the exterior environment and your foundation wall. In Ottawa's wet spring conditions — when snowmelt and rain are constant — thin parging allows moisture to reach the underlying concrete or block much sooner. That moisture then freezes in place during overnight temperature drops, attacking both the parging and the foundation material beneath it.

Poor adhesion and delamination: Counterintuitively, thinner coats can actually bond worse than properly thick ones. A very thin skim coat dries too quickly, especially on porous concrete block, and doesn't develop the strong crystalline bond structure that a fuller application achieves. On hot or windy Ottawa summer days, a thin coat can flash-dry in under an hour — well before proper hydration occurs.

The practical consequences for your wallet are significant. Parging applied at 1/8 to 3/16 inch thick might last only **3 to 5 years** in Ottawa before needing replacement. The same foundation done at proper 3/8 to 1/2 inch thickness should last **20 to 30 years**. At typical Ottawa pricing of **$8 to $14 per linear foot**, doing it right once is far cheaper than doing it twice or three times.

If you're getting quotes and one contractor's price is dramatically lower than others, ask about the number of coats and intended thickness. A single thin coat applied quickly is the most common way low bidders cut costs — and it's

a false economy every time in Ottawa's climate.

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- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- RenoMotion Inc.
- The Fixer
- Leeds Property Maintenance
- The Granite shop

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Q8

Can parging be coloured to match the stucco on the rest of my Ottawa home?

Absolutely — coloured parging is a great way to create a seamless look between your foundation and the stucco finish on the rest of your Ottawa home. There are several approaches, each with different durability and cost considerations.

Options for Colour-Matching Parging to Stucco

Integral colour (mixed into the parging): This is the most durable approach. Mineral oxide pigments are blended directly into the parging mix before application, so the colour goes all the way through. If the surface gets chipped or scratched, the colour underneath matches. Integral pigments are available in a wide range of earth tones — greys, tans, browns, terracotta — that match most stucco colours common on Ottawa homes. The limitation is that you can't achieve bright whites or very light colours with standard Portland cement mixes, since the cement itself is grey. Using white Portland cement as the base opens up lighter colour options but adds cost. Expect to pay a **$2 to $4 per linear foot premium** over standard grey parging for integral colour.

Surface-applied masonry stain: If you want an exact match to existing stucco colour, a penetrating masonry stain applied after the parging cures is often the best option. Unlike paint, masonry stain soaks into the surface and becomes part of the material — it won't peel or flake. Stains can be custom-tinted to match virtually any colour. Application is done 28 days after parging (full cure), and a quality stain lasts 10 to 15 years in Ottawa conditions. Products like Nawkaw or SmartColor are used by professionals for this purpose. Budget **$4 to $8 per linear foot**

for professional stain application.

Masonry paint: The least expensive option upfront but the worst long-term choice for Ottawa. Exterior masonry paint sits on the surface as a film. In our freeze-thaw climate, moisture trapped behind the paint film freezes and pushes the paint off in sheets — usually within 3 to 5 years. If your parging is already painted, you'll need to maintain it with fresh coats regularly or strip it and switch to stain. If you go this route anyway, use a high-quality elastomeric masonry paint that can stretch with thermal movement — expect to repaint every 4 to 6 years.

A few practical tips for getting a good colour match in Ottawa:

- **Bring a sample** of your existing stucco colour to your contractor — a small chip or even a good photograph in natural daylight helps enormously
- **Test patches are essential.** Parging colour looks different wet vs. dry, and cured colour can shift from what you see in the bucket. Always have a test patch applied and wait for full cure before committing to the whole foundation
- **Sun exposure affects appearance.** North-facing foundation walls stay damper and can appear darker than south-facing walls with the same parging mix — factor this in when choosing your shade

  For a typical Ottawa bungalow, coloured parging that matches your stucco adds **$300 to $700** to the total project cost depending on the method — a worthwhile investment for curb appeal.

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- 613Bins
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Q9

How do I maintain parging on my Ottawa home to prevent crumbling?

Proactive maintenance is the difference between parging that lasts 10 years and parging that lasts 25+ years on an Ottawa home. Our freeze-thaw climate is relentless, but a little regular attention goes a long way.

A Practical Parging Maintenance Routine for Ottawa Homeowners

Spring inspection (April-May): This is the most important check of the year. Winter does its worst damage to parging, so as soon as the snow melts, walk your foundation perimeter and look for new cracks, flaking, or areas where the parging sounds hollow when tapped. Small hairline cracks under 1/8 inch can be sealed with an elastomeric masonry sealer — products like Sikaflex or Quikrete Polyurethane Sealant flex with temperature changes rather than cracking further. Budget about **$30 to $60** in materials for a DIY touch-up.

Address cracks immediately. In Ottawa, a small crack in spring becomes a big problem by the following spring. Water enters the crack, freezes, expands by roughly 9%, and forces the crack wider. One season of neglect can turn a $50 repair into a $500 one. For cracks wider than 1/4 inch or areas where parging is actively separating from the wall, scrape out the loose material, clean the area, apply bonding agent, and patch with fresh parging mix.

Manage water away from the foundation. This is arguably more important than the parging itself. Ensure your grading slopes away from the house at a minimum of 6 inches over the first 10 feet — Ontario Building Code standard. Clean your gutters and make sure downspouts discharge at least 6 feet from the foundation. In Ottawa's clay soils, water that pools near your foundation does enormous damage to parging from the back side, as the saturated clay pushes moisture through the wall.

Control salt and de-icer exposure. If your driveway or walkway runs along the foundation, the salt spray and calcium chloride runoff from winter de-icing attacks parging aggressively. Salt causes efflorescence (white crystalline deposits) and accelerates surface deterioration. Consider switching to sand or a non-chloride de-icer near foundation walls, or at minimum, rinse the parging with clean water each spring to flush salt residue.

Keep vegetation trimmed back. Shrubs and plants growing directly against parging trap moisture, block airflow, and their roots can work into small cracks. Maintain a 6 to 12 inch gap between plantings and the foundation wall.

Apply a masonry sealer every 5 to 7 years. A breathable silane/siloxane sealer (not a film-forming sealer) allows moisture vapour to escape from inside the wall while repelling liquid water from outside. This is one of the most cost-effective maintenance steps — a quality sealer costs **$40 to $80** and a single application takes about an hour for an average Ottawa home.

Fall prep (October): Before winter hits, do a quick check for any new damage from summer storms and seal anything you find. Clear debris from the base of the foundation to prevent moisture trapping under snow cover.

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- Homeupgraders
- JC Carpentry
- Ottawa Caulking
- Humble Homes - property maintenance
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Q10

Does parging help with basement waterproofing on Ottawa homes?

Parging plays a supporting role in basement waterproofing, but it's important to understand what it can and can't do — because in Ottawa's challenging soil and water conditions, relying on parging alone for waterproofing would be a costly mistake.

What Parging Actually Does for Water Management

Parging is a thin layer of cementite mortar applied to the exterior foundation wall. It creates a **smooth, continuous surface** that fills voids, covers porous block joints, and seals minor cracks. This reduces the pathways through which water can migrate into the foundation. On poured concrete foundations, parging covers honeycombing (pockets of voids where aggregate wasn't fully covered by cement during the original pour) and minor surface cracks.

However, parging by itself is **not waterproof** — it's dampproof at best. It slows moisture migration but won't stop hydrostatic pressure from forcing water through. And in Ottawa, hydrostatic pressure is a real concern. Our predominant soil type — Leda clay (also called Champlain Sea clay) — has extremely poor drainage. When it gets wet, it holds water against your foundation like a bathtub. During spring thaw and heavy rain events, that water pressure can be substantial.

For genuine basement waterproofing in Ottawa, the standard approach is a layered system applied from the exterior:

- **Parging** — smooth, continuous base coat on the foundation wall
- **Waterproof membrane** — liquid-applied rubber or peel-and-stick membrane over the parging
- **Drainage board** — dimpled plastic sheet that channels water down to the footing drain
- **Weeping tile** — perforated pipe at the footing to collect and redirect water

  In this system, parging serves as the essential **preparation layer** — the membrane needs a smooth, clean surface to adhere properly, and parging provides that. Without parging, the membrane would bridge over voids and irregularities, creating weak spots that eventually fail.

  Ontario Building Code Section 9.13 requires dampproofing on all below-grade foundation walls and full waterproofing where the water table is high or soil drainage is poor. Given Ottawa's clay soils, most responsible contractors recommend full waterproofing rather than simple dampproofing for any home experiencing moisture issues.

A complete exterior waterproofing project in Ottawa — including excavation, parging, membrane, drainage board, new weeping tile, and backfill — typically costs **$120 to $200 per linear foot**. For a standard 30×40 foot bungalow, that's roughly **$16,000 to $28,000** for the full perimeter. Interior approaches (injection, interior drainage) run less but don't address the root cause.

If your above-grade parging is crumbling and you're seeing basement dampness, it's worth investigating — but the parging deterioration is usually a symptom, not the cause, of your moisture problem.

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- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- RenoMotion Inc.
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- The Deck Store Inc
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Q11

What is the best time of year to apply parging in Ottawa?

Timing is everything with parging in Ottawa. Apply it during the wrong conditions and you'll watch it crack and flake within a single winter. Get the timing right and a quality parging job can last 20 to 30 years.

The Ideal Parging Window in Ottawa

The best window for parging in Ottawa is **mid-May through mid-September**, with the sweet spot being **June through August**. What you're looking for is consistent daytime temperatures above 10°C and nighttime temperatures that don't dip below 5°C for at least 48 to 72 hours after application. Parging needs time to cure through a chemical hydration process — if it freezes before that process completes, the internal crystal structure is permanently weakened.

Here's how Ottawa's seasons break down for parging work:

Late April to mid-May: Risky. Daytime temps can hit 15-20°C, which feels great, but Ottawa nights still regularly drop to 0-3°C through early May. If you must start early, work on south- and west-facing walls that retain more warmth overnight, and protect fresh parging with insulated blankets if frost is forecast.

Mid-May to mid-September: Prime season. This is when Ottawa contractors schedule the bulk of their parging work. You'll get reliable curing conditions and the longest drying window before winter. Booking in this window is competitive — plan to schedule your contractor 3 to 6 weeks in advance.

Late September to mid-October: Workable but increasingly risky. Early October nights in Ottawa average around 5°C, which is right at the margin. Experienced contractors can still do quality work here, but the curing window shrinks and there's less margin for error.

Late October through April: No-go. Ottawa's sustained below-freezing temperatures make proper curing impossible without heated enclosures, which are cost-prohibitive for residential parging.

Beyond temperature, watch the **humidity and rain forecast**. Parging should not be applied during rain or when rain is expected within 24 hours. Conversely, extremely hot and dry days (above 30°C with low humidity) can cause the parging to dry too fast, leading to shrinkage cracks. On hot days, mist the fresh parging lightly with water for the first day or two to slow the cure — this is called moist curing and it significantly improves strength.

Wind is another factor Ottawa homeowners often overlook. Our spring winds can be relentless, especially in open suburban areas like Barrhaven and Stittsville. Strong wind accelerates surface drying and causes the same shrinkage problems as extreme heat.

Pricing doesn't vary much by season in Ottawa — expect **$8 to $14 per linear foot** for above-grade parging regardless of timing. But early-season bookings (March-April) often get you first priority on the schedule.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

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- Vanguard Environmental
- The Deck Store Inc
- Jaiko Cleaning Services

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Q12

Can parging be applied over old flaking parging on my Ottawa home?

This is one of the most common questions Ottawa homeowners ask, and the short answer is: **not directly over flaking material**. Applying new parging over a deteriorated layer is a recipe for early failure, especially in our climate. Here's what actually works.

Why You Need to Remove Flaking Parging First

Flaking parging has already lost its bond with the foundation wall underneath. If you apply fresh parging on top of it, the new layer bonds to the old flaking layer — not to the concrete or block. When Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles start working on it (and we average over 50 cycles per winter), the old layer continues to separate, taking your fresh parging with it. You'll be back to square one within two to three seasons, having wasted both time and money.

The proper approach is to **remove all loose and flaking material** down to solid substrate. This means using a cold chisel and hammer, an angle grinder with a masonry cup wheel, or a pressure washer to strip away everything that isn't firmly bonded. You don't necessarily need to remove every trace of old parging — sections that are still rock-solid and well-adhered can stay. The goal is to eliminate anything that moves, sounds hollow when tapped, or crumbles under pressure.

Once stripped, the exposed foundation surface should be wire-brushed, cleaned of dust and debris, and dampened before applying new parging. A liquid bonding agent applied to the bare concrete dramatically improves adhesion — this step alone can add 10+ years to the life of the repair.

In cases where the old parging is **mostly intact with just a few flaking spots**, a targeted repair approach works well. Remove the damaged sections, feather the edges of the remaining parging by grinding them down at an angle, and patch with fresh mix. This is more economical than a full strip and re-parge. Spot repairs in Ottawa typically run **$300 to $800** depending on the extent of damage, while a full strip and re-parge of a typical bungalow foundation costs **$1,200 to $2,500**.

One exception worth mentioning: if your foundation has multiple layers of old parging stacked on top of each other (a common find on older homes in Sandy Hill, Old Ottawa South, and the Glebe), stripping everything back to bare foundation is almost always the right call. Multiple layers create a thick, rigid sandwich that has no flexibility — and flexibility is essential for surviving Ottawa winters.

Timing matters too. Plan removal and re-application for **late May through September** when nighttime temperatures stay reliably above 5°C. Parging applied in marginal conditions is parging that will flake again prematurely.

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Q13

How thick should parging be applied on a concrete block foundation in Ottawa?

Getting the right thickness for parging on a concrete block foundation is one of the most important factors in how long it will last — and in Ottawa's punishing freeze-thaw climate, thickness matters even more than in milder regions.

Recommended Parging Thickness for Ottawa Block Foundations

For above-grade parging on concrete block in Ottawa, the ideal thickness is **3/8 to 1/2 inch (10 to 13 mm)**, applied in two coats. The first coat — called the scratch coat — goes on at roughly 1/4 inch and is scored with horizontal lines to give the second coat something to grip. After the scratch coat cures for 24 to 48 hours, the finish coat brings total thickness into that 3/8 to 1/2 inch range.

Why two coats? A single thick application is prone to cracking as it cures, especially on block foundations where the joints between blocks create an uneven surface. Concrete block is also more porous than poured concrete, meaning it absorbs moisture from the parging mix faster — which can cause a single thick coat to dry too quickly and develop shrinkage cracks. Those cracks become entry points for water, and once Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles get to work, flaking and spalling follow within a few seasons.

For below-grade parging on block, thickness should be at the upper end — **1/2 inch minimum** — since it needs to resist hydrostatic pressure from wet soil. Many Ottawa contractors apply a full 1/2 to 5/8 inch below grade, especially in areas with heavy clay soils like Barrhaven, Kanata, and Orleans where water retention is high.

The parging mix itself matters as much as thickness. A proper Ottawa parging mix uses **1 part Portland cement to 3 parts clean masonry sand**, with a bonding agent or acrylic additive mixed into the water. The acrylic additive (products like Quikrete Concrete Bonding Adhesive) improves flexibility and adhesion — both critical in our climate where the wall substrate expands and contracts with temperature swings.

Before applying any parging, the block surface must be clean, free of loose material, and dampened — not soaked, just damp. On old block foundations, a wire brush pass removes deteriorated material and opens the pores for better adhesion. If the block is severely weathered or crumbling, a skim coat of bonding slurry should be applied first.

Professional parging on concrete block in Ottawa typically costs **$10 to $16 per linear foot** for above-grade work, reflecting the extra preparation and two-coat process that block requires compared to smooth poured concrete. It's worth every dollar — properly applied parging on block should last 20 to 30 years in Ottawa conditions.

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Q14

Should parging be applied above and below grade on an Ottawa foundation?

Yes — for Ottawa foundations, parging should be applied both above and below grade, but each zone serves a different purpose and uses slightly different techniques. Understanding this distinction is key to getting long-lasting results in our climate.

Above-Grade vs. Below-Grade Parging in Ottawa

Above-grade parging is the visible portion of your foundation wall, typically extending 12 to 24 inches above the soil line. This layer is primarily aesthetic — it gives your home a clean, finished look — but it also protects the concrete or block from direct rain, snow splash, and freeze-thaw damage. In Ottawa, where winter temperatures regularly drop below ?20°C and we see over 50 freeze-thaw cycles per season, this protective function is critical. A quality above-grade parging job in Ottawa typically runs **$8 to $14 per linear foot**, depending on wall height and condition.

Below-grade parging is applied to the foundation wall that sits underground, from the footing up to grade level. This layer acts as a moisture barrier and protects against soil pressure, root intrusion, and water migration into the block or poured concrete. Below-grade parging is usually thicker — around 3/8 to 1/2 inch — and is often paired with a waterproof membrane or coating like bituminous tar or a dimpled drainage board.

When below-grade parging is part of a foundation waterproofing project that involves excavation, costs increase significantly — typically **$120 to $180 per linear foot** for excavation, parging, membrane, and backfill combined. The parging component alone is modest, but the labour to expose the wall is where the real expense lies.

Ontario Building Code requirements for foundation moisture protection (Section 9.13) mandate that below-grade walls have appropriate dampproofing or waterproofing depending on soil conditions and water table levels. In Ottawa's Leda clay soils — which hold water and swell — proper below-grade treatment is especially important. Many older homes in neighbourhoods like Alta Vista, Westboro, and the Glebe were built with minimal or no below-grade parging, which is why basement moisture problems are so common in those areas.

For above-grade work, application should happen when temperatures are consistently above 5°C for at least 48 hours after application — typically late April through mid-October in Ottawa. Below-grade work follows the same temperature rules but is less exposed to wind chill since the wall is in a trench.

If you're already excavating for waterproofing, always have parging applied below grade at the same time — the incremental cost is minimal compared to digging twice. For above-grade-only refreshes, most Ottawa homes benefit from a new coat every 15 to 25 years depending on exposure and original quality.

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Q15

What causes parging to crack and fall off foundations in Ottawa?

Parging failure is one of the most visible maintenance issues on Ottawa homes, and understanding why it happens helps you decide whether a repair or replacement makes sense — and how to make the next application last longer.

The Primary Causes

Freeze-thaw cycling is the number one killer. Ottawa experiences 50–70 freeze-thaw cycles in a typical winter. Each cycle pushes water into the parging's pores, freezes it (expanding roughly 9%), thaws it, and repeats. Over

years, this creates a network of micro-cracks that progressively weaken the material until chunks begin separating. The base of the foundation wall — where snow sits against it from December through March — gets the worst of this abuse.

Poor surface preparation during original application is the second most common cause. If parging was applied over a dusty, painted, or dry foundation surface, the mechanical bond was compromised from day one. You'll recognize this when parging comes off in clean sheets with a smooth backside — it was never properly adhered.

Inadequate mix or thickness. Parging that was mixed too wet (common with DIY applications), applied too thin (under 1/4"), or made with a basic sand-cement ratio without polymer modifiers simply can't withstand Ottawa's temperature extremes. The annual range from -30°C to +35°C means the foundation and parging are constantly expanding and contracting at slightly different rates, creating shear stress at the bond line.

Other contributing factors include:

- **Moisture from behind the foundation** — Hydrostatic pressure pushes groundwater through concrete, saturating the parging from the back. This water freezes at the bond line and pushes the parging off.- **Poor drainage** — Missing or clogged weeping tile, grading that slopes toward the house, or downspouts dumping water at the foundation means the parging is constantly saturated.- **Salt damage** — De-icing salt splashed onto the foundation by foot traffic, vehicles, or snowplows causes salt crystallization within the parging pores, which exerts pressure similar to ice formation.- **Soil contact** — Parging that extends below grade into the soil absorbs moisture constantly through capillary action. It should terminate at or slightly above grade level.- **Physical impact** — Lawn mowers, snow shovels, and garden equipment chip parging at the base, creating entry points for water.- **Age** — Even well-applied parging has a lifespan of 15–25 years in Ottawa. Original parging on a 30-year-old home has simply reached the end of its service life.

  Prevention for the next application: Use a polymer-modified mix, ensure the wall is properly cleaned and dampened, apply at least 3/8" thickness in two coats, maintain positive grading away from the foundation, and keep snow and salt away from the base where possible. These steps can extend parging life from the 10–15 year range well past 20 years in Ottawa conditions. New parging typically runs **$1,500–$4,000** for a full foundation perimeter.

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Q16

How do Ottawa contractors prepare a foundation wall before applying parging?

Surface preparation is genuinely the most important part of a parging job — more important than the mix, the application technique, or the finish. A beautiful parging coat applied to a poorly prepared foundation will delaminate within a few Ottawa winters. Here's what proper prep looks like.

The Full Preparation Process

1. Remove all existing failed material. If there's old parging that's crumbling, hollow, or delaminated, it all comes off. Contractors use a cold chisel and hammer, an angle grinder with a masonry wheel, or in some cases a small jackhammer for stubborn material. Every bit of loose or poorly bonded old parging needs to go — leaving any behind creates a weak layer that the new parging will eventually separate from.
2. Clean the surface thoroughly. The exposed foundation needs to be free of:

- Dust and loose particles (power washing or stiff wire brushing)- Efflorescence — those white salt deposits that indicate moisture migration- Paint or sealers — these prevent the parging from bonding to the concrete- Oil, grease, or tar — sometimes found on foundations near driveways or where damp-proofing was applied above grade- Organic growth — moss, mildew, or algae that trap moisture

  Most Ottawa contractors use a pressure washer at 2,000–3,000 PSI for this step. It's fast, effective, and reveals any additional areas of deterioration that weren't visible under the dirt.

  3. Repair significant defects. Large voids, holes from old tie wires, crumbling mortar joints (on block foundations), or deep cracks get filled with a hydraulic cement or patching compound before the parging coats go on. This creates a more uniform substrate and prevents weak spots.

  4. Dampen the surface. Concrete and block are porous and will suck moisture out of fresh parging too quickly if applied to a dry surface, weakening the bond and causing premature cracking. The wall should be damp — not dripping wet, but uniformly moistened. Experienced contractors will wet the wall the evening before and again the morning of application.

  5. Apply a bonding agent (when needed). On very smooth poured concrete foundations, a liquid bonding agent or slurry coat (thin cement paste brushed on) helps the parging grip the surface. Block foundations with their textured mortar joints usually don't need this step — the joints provide mechanical keying.

  What to watch for as a homeowner: If a contractor shows up and starts applying parging over dirty, dry, or painted foundation without any of these steps, that's a red flag. Proper prep adds **$200–$500** to the job compared to skipping it, but it's the difference between parging that lasts 20 years and parging that fails in 3–5

Ottawa winters. The prep work should take at least half a day for a full-perimeter job — if someone is done in an hour, corners are being cut.

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Q17

Can crumbling parging on my Ottawa home be patched or does it need full replacement?

The honest answer is: it depends on how widespread the damage is and whether the remaining parging is still well-bonded. Here's how to evaluate what you're dealing with and make the right call.

When Patching Makes Sense

Patching is a good option when the damage is **localized** — meaning most of your parging is still solid and well-adhered, with just a few problem areas. Specifically:

- **Isolated crumbling near grade level** — The bottom 6–12 inches of parging takes the most abuse from splash-back, snow contact, and salt. If this strip is failing but everything above it is solid, a patch repair works well.- **Damage around penetrations** — Crumbling around a basement window, gas line, or water spigot can be repaired without touching the rest of the wall.- **A single wall face** — If only your north-facing foundation wall has deteriorated (common in Ottawa because it stays damp longest), you can re-parge just that section.- **Cracks without delamination** — If you can tap the parging and it sounds solid (not hollow), cracks alone can usually be filled and skim-coated.

  Patch repairs in Ottawa typically cost **$200–$600** depending on the area involved.

When Full Replacement Is the Better Investment

Full replacement is the smarter choice when:

- **More than 30–40% of the surface is damaged or hollow** — At this point, patching becomes a whack-a-mole game. You'll fix one area and another will fail next winter.- **The parging is delaminating in sheets** — If you can pull or pry chunks off easily, the bond to the foundation has failed. This usually means the original surface prep was inadequate or decades of freeze-thaw have broken the adhesion throughout.- **You can see foundation block or concrete underneath** — Once the substrate is exposed, water is getting directly into the foundation material and freeze-thaw damage accelerates rapidly.- **The parging is very old (25+ years)** — If it's original to an older Ottawa home and showing widespread deterioration, the remaining material is likely near end of life too.

  The tap test is your best diagnostic tool. Walk around your foundation and tap every couple of feet with your knuckles or a screwdriver handle. Solid parging gives a sharp, hard sound. Delaminated parging sounds hollow or dull — and that material is going to fail soon even if it looks okay visually.

  Full foundation parging replacement on a typical Ottawa home runs **$1,500–$4,000**, which includes removing the old material, cleaning and prepping the foundation surface, and applying new polymer-modified parging in two coats. The advantage of full replacement is you get a consistent, fresh surface with a modern mix designed for Ottawa's freeze-thaw demands, and you're typically covered by a workmanship warranty for 2–5 years depending on the contractor.

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Q18

What is the difference between parging and stucco on a foundation in Ottawa?

This is one of the most common questions Ottawa homeowners ask, and the confusion is understandable — parging and stucco look similar, use related materials, and both get applied to exterior walls. But they serve different purposes and have different characteristics that matter for your Ottawa home.

The Core Differences

Parging is a thin protective coating (typically 3/8" to 1/2" thick) applied to foundation walls — poured concrete, concrete block, or stone. Its primary job is *protection*: shielding the foundation from water infiltration, freeze-thaw damage, and physical deterioration. It's usually applied in one or two coats with a relatively simple smooth or lightly textured finish. In Ottawa, parging covers the exposed portion of your foundation between the siding and the ground — typically 1 to 3 feet.

Stucco is a thicker, multi-layer cladding system (typically 7/8" to 1" total) applied to above-grade walls as the primary exterior finish. It consists of three distinct coats — scratch coat, brown coat, and finish coat — applied over metal lath and a weather-resistant barrier. Stucco is a *wall cladding*, serving as your home's exterior surface from the foundation up to the roofline.

Key differences at a glance:

- **Thickness** — Parging: 3/8"–1/2" | Stucco: 7/8"–1"- **Number of coats** — Parging: 1–2 | Stucco: 3- **Substrate** — Parging: directly on concrete/block | Stucco: over lath and building paper on wood or steel framing- **Purpose** — Parging: foundation protection | Stucco: wall cladding and aesthetics- **Cost in Ottawa** — Parging: **$8–$14/sq ft** | Stucco: **$12–$25/sq ft**- **Finish options** — Parging: smooth or light texture | Stucco: wide range (dash, lace, sand, smooth, custom patterns)

  Mix composition also differs. Parging mixes in Ottawa increasingly use polymer-modified formulations for better freeze-thaw resistance. They're designed to bond directly to concrete. Stucco mixes are formulated for bulk and strength, with specific ratios for each of the three coat layers, and they bond to metal lath rather than the wall surface itself.

  Where it gets confusing in Ottawa: Some contractors apply stucco-style finishes to foundation walls, especially on homes where the exposed foundation is tall (walkout basements, for example). This is essentially heavy-duty parging with a decorative finish — it's still protecting the foundation, but it looks like the stucco above it for a seamless appearance. This hybrid approach costs a bit more than basic parging but creates a much cleaner look.

  For most Ottawa homes, you'll want standard parging on the foundation portion and proper three-coat stucco (if applicable) on the walls above. Using the right system in the right location ensures both areas perform well

through our demanding winters.

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Q19

How long does parging last on a foundation wall in Ottawa's climate?

In Ottawa's climate, properly applied parging on a foundation wall typically lasts **15–25 years** before it needs significant repair or replacement. That's a wide range, and where your parging falls on that spectrum depends on several factors specific to your home and its exposure.

What Determines Parging Lifespan in Ottawa

Material quality matters enormously. Traditional parging made with a basic sand-and-Portland-cement mix tends to be more rigid and crack-prone, lasting closer to 10–15 years in Ottawa. Modern polymer-modified parging mixes (brands like Durabond or Quikrete's polymer parging) include acrylic additives that provide flexibility and better freeze-thaw resistance, pushing lifespan toward 20–25 years.

Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycle is the primary enemy. With 50–70 freeze-thaw cycles per winter, water that penetrates the parging surface expands repeatedly, gradually breaking the bond to the foundation. South and west-facing walls often fare slightly better because they dry out faster after rain or snow melt. North-facing walls that stay damp are typically the first to fail.

Other factors that affect longevity:

- **Grading and drainage** — If soil slopes toward your foundation or downspouts dump water near the wall, parging degrades much faster from constant moisture exposure and splash-back- **Snow piling** — Snowbanks that sit against the foundation all winter keep parging saturated during the most damaging freeze-thaw period- **Salt exposure** — Homes near roads that get heavy salt application see accelerated deterioration, as salt crystals grow inside the parging pores- **Application thickness** — Parging should be at least 3/8" to 1/2" thick in Ottawa. Anything thinner lacks the durability to withstand our temperature extremes (-30°C to +35°C)- **Surface preparation** — Parging applied to a dirty, dustite, or painted foundation without proper prep will delaminate well before its time

  Signs it's time for replacement:

- Large sections have separated from the foundation (hollow sound when tapped)- Chunks are falling off, exposing raw concrete or block- Widespread cracking in a map or spider-web pattern- Persistent dampness or efflorescence (white salt deposits) on interior basement walls

  Full foundation parging in Ottawa typically costs **$1,500–$4,000** for an average home, depending on the height of exposed foundation (usually 1–3 feet) and the total perimeter. It's one of the more affordable ways to protect your foundation and improve curb appeal — a worthwhile investment given the alternative is water infiltration

and accelerated concrete deterioration.

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