What to Check When Choosing Flyscreens for Patio and Bifold Doors

Why standard flyscreens often fall short on large door openings

Patio doors, bifold doors, French doors and sliding doors share one thing in common: they open up a wall to let in light and air. That same opening is an invitation for flies, wasps, mosquitoes and other insects to wander inside. A flyscreen that works on a small window may not suit a wide or tall door opening. The frame can obstruct the view, the mesh can sag, and the whole setup can feel like a permanent barrier rather than a seasonal aid. For homeowners who want to keep the door open without worrying about what flies in, a few practical checks make the difference between a screen that gets used and one that gets taken down and stored away.

Check the fit: made to measure versus off the shelf

Door openings vary. A standard-sized screen might cover a small window, but patio and bifold doors often have non-standard widths and heights. A screen that is too small leaves gaps around the edges where insects can enter. A screen that is too large has to be folded or bunched, which spoils the look and the function. Made to measure flyscreens avoid this problem because they are cut to the exact dimensions of the opening. The fit should be snug but not tight enough to strain the frame or the mesh. Checking the measurement process before ordering is worth the time. Some suppliers ask for the width and height in several places to account for walls that are not perfectly square. That attention to detail matters when the screen is the only thing between your living room and the garden.

Look at the retraction system: what happens when the screen is not in use

A fixed flyscreen that stays in place all year can make a room feel closed in, especially when the doors are shut and the weather is poor. A retractable system solves that by letting you pull the screen across only when the door is open. The best designs use a spring-loaded roller or a cassette that hides the mesh completely when it is not needed. This is where the idea of screens that disappear when unused becomes important. If the cassette is bulky or the mesh does not roll up evenly, the system can look untidy and may be awkward to operate. Check whether the cassette is surface-mounted or recessed. Surface-mounted cassettes are easier to install but sit outside the frame. Recessed versions sit inside the door frame and keep a cleaner line. For bifold doors with multiple panels that fold away, a retractable cassette

mounted at the top of the opening can cover the whole width without interfering with the panels.



Assess the mesh quality: visibility, airflow and insect exclusion

Not all meshes are the same. Fibreglass mesh is common because it is lightweight, strong and does not rust. The mesh size determines what insects it stops. A standard mesh keeps out most flies and mosquitoes but may let through very small gnats, while a finer mesh stops almost everything but reduces airflow and light. For patio doors, a balance is needed. The mesh should be fine enough to block common flying insects but open enough that you still feel a breeze. The colour of the mesh also matters. Dark meshes give a clearer view through the screen because they absorb light rather than reflect it. Lighter meshes can create a glare that makes the screen visible even when you are not looking directly at it. If you want to preserve the view of the garden, a dark mesh in a fine weave is a good starting point. Some homeowners also look for a mesh that is coated to resist UV damage, so it does not become brittle after a few summers in direct sunlight.

Consider side channels for a secure seal

Even a well-fitted screen can let insects in if there are gaps at the sides. Side channels are vertical tracks that guide the edges of the screen as it moves across. They close the gap

between the screen and the door frame, which stops insects from crawling around the edge. For bifold doors, side channels are especially useful because the door panels themselves can leave small gaps when folded back. Without side channels, you may find that the screen works well in the middle but has gaps at the ends. The channels also help the screen tension stay even, which reduces sagging over time. When checking a product, ask whether side channels are included in the price or sold separately, and whether they can be fitted to your specific door frame material, whether that is wood, uPVC or aluminium.

Think about operation: manual versus pull cord versus motorised

How you open and close the screen affects how often you actually use it. A screen that is fiddly to pull across or difficult to retract will end up left in place, which defeats the point of having a retractable system. Manual operation means you pull the screen by hand from one side to the other. This works well for doors up to about two metres wide. For wider openings, a pull cord or a wand can make the action smoother because you do not have to reach across the full width. Motorised systems use a small electric motor that retracts and extends the screen at the press of a button. They are more expensive and require power near the door, but they are convenient for large bifold setups or for doors that are used frequently. If you choose a motorised system, check whether it runs on batteries or needs a mains connection. Battery-powered units are easier to install but require periodic recharging or replacement of batteries.



Check the frame and fixings for your door type

The frame that holds the screen must attach securely to the door opening. For wooden frames, screws bite well and hold firmly. For uPVC or aluminium frames, you may need specialist fixings or adhesive mounts that do not damage the surface. Some screens come with a universal mounting kit that works across materials, but it is worth checking the instructions before buying. If the screen is heavy, as some wide models can be, the fixings need to be strong enough to hold the weight over time. A screen that pulls away from the frame after a season is frustrating and leaves gaps for insects. Homeowners with bifold doors should also check whether the screen frame interferes with the folding mechanism. In most cases, the screen mounts above the door opening, so the panels fold underneath it without issue, but it is wise to measure the clearance when the door is fully open.

Think about storage when not in use

Even with a retractable system, the mesh has to go somewhere when it is rolled up. A compact cassette that sits flush against the wall or the ceiling is the most discreet option. Larger cassettes can protrude and become a visual distraction, especially in rooms where the door is a focal point. The idea of screens that disappear when unused is what makes a retractable flyscreen feel like a permanent part of the house rather than an add-on. If the cassette is too prominent, you may find yourself wishing you could remove it entirely during the winter. Some models offer a removable cassette that can be taken down and stored, though this adds a step each season. For most people, a fixed cassette that blends in with the door frame or is painted to match the wall is the simplest solution.

Look at the warranty and the material guarantees

A flyscreen that sits on a door opening faces sun, rain, wind and temperature changes. The mesh and the frame need to withstand those conditions without degrading quickly. Check what the manufacturer covers in the warranty. Some warranties cover the mesh against fraying or UV damage for a set number of years. Others cover the retraction mechanism, which is the part most likely to fail if the spring or the roller breaks. A longer warranty is usually a sign that the manufacturer expects the product to last. It also gives you recourse if something goes wrong after a season or two. While no warranty can predict how a screen will perform in your specific location, it is a useful indicator of build quality.



Final practical checks before you buy

Before committing to a flyscreen, measure the opening yourself and compare it with the supplier's sizing guide. If you have bifold doors that fold inward or outward, note which direction they fold so the screen does not get in the way. Consider how often you will use the door during the summer. If you open it daily, a smooth retraction system and strong mesh become more important than if you only open it a few times a year. Think about the view from inside. A screen that is too visible can spoil the open feeling that patio doors are meant to provide. Choosing a dark mesh in a fine weave, mounted in a cassette that disappears when retracted, gives the best chance of enjoying the outdoors without the insects.