

EFFLORESCENCE

The formation of a white salty deposit on the face of brickwork is called efflorescence. It can occur on brickwork which has become saturated during the building process. Efflorescence often emanates from the mortar joints rather than the brick, due to the presence of soluble alkali salts in the sand and cement.

Efflorescence usually occurs in the spring as a result of the drying out of brickwork built during the wet winter months. As the building dries, the salts are left behind as the water evaporates, forming the white deposit typical of this phenomenon.

Efflorescence is a temporary problem and is best cured by the effects of time and weather. It will usually disappear within a few weeks, being washed away by normal rainfall. With softer bricks there is a certain amount of re-absorption, which takes a little longer to clear.

Efflorescence rarely appears on summer-built structures and much can be done to prevent its occurrence by the builder ensuring brickwork is covered overnight and during wet conditions.

Whilst natural weathering is preferable, efflorescence can be removed by brushing down with a stiff non-metallic brush, making sure that the deposit does not enter the brickwork at a lower level. Any remaining deposit can be removed or reduced using a minimum quantity of clean water. This treatment may be necessary in sheltered areas beneath overhanging eaves and cills which are not exposed to the elements.

On no occasion should chemical cleaning methods be used to remove these salts.

Although temporarily unsightly, this is a purely aesthetic problem and is of no detriment to the long-term durability of the bricks or brickwork.

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