

Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - Part I - Rubber Covers by Tom Holtey

Lost a Kayak Hatch Cover? What now?

Many kayaks come with storage options. Internal storage space below deck is common. A hatch cover allows internal access and it keeps the water out of the hull. Hatch covers are often misplaced or lost; hopefully not while it is on the water. Without a fully functional hatch cover your kayak will have a gaping hole in it, and will not be safe to use. Replacement of a lost hatch cover is essential to use the kayak again.



By reading this series you will be able to determine the type of cover your kayak is or was outfitted with, and how you might go about replacing a lost or damaged cover. If you are lucky you can remember the lost hatch cover in detail, or find a replacement part number from the manufacture of your kayak. It can be worth a call to the kayak maker for these details. A database of replacement parts for kayaks does not exist. The kayak industry is not at all like the auto parts industry. Many kayak companies do not keep accurate records of past kayak models or the parts they take. The older the kayak the greater the challenge.

Most of the parts used to assemble kayaks, including hatches, are made by boating and marine supply companies and plastic molders. These companies may label the hatch cover with their own brand, or "brand" the cover with a kayak company logo of the kayak manufacture that is buying them for assembly of their kayaks. Some may even have a part number molded into it. We will start this series with rubber covers.

Hatch covers come in four basic styles:

Rubber Covers



Double Covers



Deck Plates



Strap Over Covers



Rubber Covers

Rubber covers work like a Tupperware and may, or may not, be rubbery. This style is pressed in place, and snaps down onto a lip that stands up from the kayak deck. Sometimes this lip is molded as part of the kayak deck, other times the lip is a ring bolted, or glued to the kayak deck. They can be round, egg shape or oval, in a multitude of sizes.



Rubber covers function very much like a Tupperware container and as such can be approached in the same way, as if packing soup for lunch. For this type of cover to seal, and just as important, to stay put, the cover must be pressed firmly all around the perimeter. Failure to do so will allow the cover to leak, or come off while car topping on the highway!

This style of cover is very vulnerable to loss while car topping. You may want to consider adding a **cover strap**.



The keeper cord will not prevent loss while traveling at 60 mph.

Once the cover is lost replacing it can be difficult because you do not have the cover any more to find a match. Like a Tupperware, there are many sizes of covers, and a close fit is not a good fit. You must have an exact fit. Some kayak makers use standard covers found on many brands of kayaks. Other kayak makers have unique covers useable only with a certain make and model of kayak. Fortunately many covers are still available, while only a few are completely discontinued.

Valley Canoe Products (VCP) brand hatch covers are very common. They are imported. Valley Canoe Products hatch covers are often marked: Nottingham England. There are two Valley two covers common in North America, called the 8" round and 17.25 x 10" oval. They have not changed for decades. VCP covers are very common on high performance sea kayaks. Wilderness Systems used VCP covers in the 1990s.

Modern Necky brand kayaks are outfitted with these British made covers today (2013). VCP Covers are prone to "rotting" over time, about 4-6 yrs., crumbling rubber is often a good identification marker. They can easily be identified by their concentric ring pattern on the top surface.

Kajak Sport brand covers are common on many kayaks of all types. They are imported from Finland, N. Europe. Modern Wilderness Systems Pro line kayaks are outfitted with Kajak Sport covers. You will also find them on some older Perception and Aquaterra kayaks of the 1990s, as well as modern Bic sit-on-top kayaks.

Many high quality sea kayaks, in a wide range of brands, are outfitted with Kajak Sport covers, in "original rubber" and "click-on" versions (+ several variations) all fit the same rims. Kajak Sport has several round sizes (10, 15, 20, 25 centimeters) and two oval sizes 42x30cm and 44x26cm. Kajak Sport hatch covers can be easily identified by a sunburst pattern on the top surface. Kajak Sport covers are very durable and supple.

Popular sizes of Kajak Sport and Valley Canoe Product brand hatch covers are now made in the USA by **Sealect Designs**. The VCP round and oval covers as well as the Kajak Sport 25cm and both ovals are available. These US made replacement hatch covers are engineered to fit the imported rims on existing kayaks, as well as rims that are molded as part of the deck. You can simply snap them on just like the original covers. No installation is required. High quality UV resistant materials are used to make these covers. They float and are buoyant on water. SeaLect Designs hatch covers can be easily identified by a smooth top surface.

Perception and Dagger make their own "dual density" covers (black and gray) in two sizes, a large oval and a smaller round. Modern Perception and Dagger hatch covers are identical and interchangeable. The 3 sister brands, Perception, Dagger and Mainstream, made their own plain black rubber hatches, one **round**, one **oval**, with logo, circa 2000. They are now largely unavailable. The 10-inch version was based on the Kajak Sport 24cm, and it is the closest possible match. These older black rubber cover are also interchangeable, but not a match to the modern versions.

Wilderness Systems has their own "dual density" covers. They are black and gray and are branded with a large W. **Plain black rubber round and oval hatch covers were made by Wilderness Systems circa 2001**, for only a short span of years. Some older Necky and Old Town brand kayaks were outfitted with **egg shape rubber hatch covers** in two sizes, **small and large**. Some Necky branded covers still remain (2013) and are a match to the Old Town.

Ocean Kayak **Gaspachi hatch covers** come in two types, oval and round. They only fit Ocean Kayak brand boats. There are other kayak brands and rubber covers not addressed here.

Some rubber covers may have been outfitted with a locking ring or bungee loop. In many cases these are not 100% needed, but if your kayak was originally outfitted with such you should continue use as long as it is still serviceable. Bungee can be replaced, locking rings may be quite difficult to source.



Rubber Covers come round, sized by diameter, oval, sized by length and width, and egg shape, also sized by length and the widest dimension. Typically the hatch is "named" by the working dimensions of the hatch opening.

This means that an eight-inch hatch will have a useable opening of approximately eight inches, but the cover will be slightly larger than that.

The outside dimension of the hatch lip, around the hatch opening will be your key to finding the replacement cover.



Match the outside dimensions of the hatch lip to the inside dimensions of the hatch cover. Bear in mind that the cover will fit very snugly, and is rubber so will stretch a bit. Also, the cover has an internal groove around the inside of the edge that matches a ridge on the outside edge hatch opening.

Expect maybe a 1/2 to 1/4 inch discrepancy. The groove inside the hatch cover must also match the lip, in terms of placement, up, or down, above the deck surface.

These factors will make it difficult to confirm a fit by size alone. The proof is in the fitting of the cover to the kayak. Be prepared to make a 2nd try.

There are a few rubber covers that cannot be replaced. For example the plain black rubber oval hatch covers of older Wilderness Systems kayaks, such as the **Cape Lookout**, are no longer made. This hatch can be swapped out with a **VCP oval hatch cover and a Valley Oval Rim** but will require a challenging retrofit operation, a "hatch transplant". The old style Wilderness Systems black round hatch may be difficult to match.

If you cannot find a cover that fits you may have to re-install the entire hatch, a "hatch transplant". Typically this will mean removing, cutting off the old hatch rim/lip, leaving, as much of the deck surface as possible. If you are lucky, you can simply unscrew a rim bolted to the deck.

As with a cover fit, you may not find a good fitting replacement Hatch Rim the 1st time around. Plan carefully; do not cut the deck unless you have a positive fit. Be prepared to test a second rim for fit. The Harmony kits that contain Kajak

Sport hatches have instructions on how to do this.

The Harmony brand hatch kits with **Kajak Sport covers and rims** are made up to retrofit Wilderness Systems brand dual density hatches that do not fit well. These three sizes, **20cm, 24cm and 42x30cm**, closely match the 8" day hatch, 10" bow hatch and the oval stern hatch, common on modern Wilderness systems sea kayaks.

Rubber covers will tend to deteriorate over time, like an old rubber band. Check your covers periodically for weakness. If you have any doubt about the cover seek a replacement, or at the very least use a float bag.

In the next installment of this series we will cover deck plates that screw in, close with latches and press fit.

Article Resources:

- Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - **Part II - Deck Plates**
- Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - **Part III - Double Cover Hatch Systems**