

Painting Made Simple

By far the biggest "bang for your buck" as well the quickest way to upgrade the appearance of your house comes from updating the paint in your rooms. Painting is relatively inexpensive (around \$100 per room) and can make a major improvement in your home's appearance. The most important thing to remember about painting is not to rush into it. Preparation takes time, but proper preparation will reward you with a professional looking job at the end.

Do Some Figuring Before You Start

There are basically two kinds of paint for your walls. Latex (or water based) paint is by far the most popular and the easiest to work with. It dries relatively quickly (about four hours to the touch), and can be cleaned up with soap and water. Alkyd or oil based paints are longer wearing and highly resistant to traffic, but have a longer drying time. They also need to be cleaned up with solvent or turpentine, and can have a very strong odor, which some folks find offensive. Both types of paint come in wide ranges of colors, so either type can provide almost any color you might want.

After you have made your choice of paint type and color, you need to figure out how much paint is required. A gallon of paint covers approximately 400 sq. ft. An 8 by 12 foot room with a standard 8-foot ceiling would require 320 sq. ft of coverage. (2 walls $8 \times 8 = 128$ sq. ft., and 2 walls $8 \times 12 = 192$ sq. ft.) In this case one gallon of paint will provide a single coat of coverage, with a little left over. If you are changing the colors on the walls, or if your walls have only been painted by your homebuilder, you should figure two coats to provide proper coverage. Plan accordingly.

Getting Started

1. Move the furniture right out of the room (if possible), so you'll have room to work. If that's not possible, move it into the center of the room and cover it with drop cloths.
2. Make sure you cover the floor with drop cloths as well. You can buy professional type canvas drop cloths at your building supply store, however, old sheets or blankets doubled over will also work well, and even things like old rubber backed curtains will do a fine job. Try to avoid putting those thin plastic drop cloths on the floor. They are slippery to walk on, and because they are so light, they seldom stay where you put them.
3. Remove or tape over all light fixtures and switch and outlet plates.
4. Patch any small cracks and nail holes with spackle or joint compound, using a putty knife to push the compound into the hole or crack, and spread it smoothly on the wall. After the compound dries, sand the patch smooth. It's also a good idea to give the entire wall a light sanding as well. This provides a roughened surface for the new paint to grip (painters call it a "tooth").

5. Wash the walls with Tri Sodium Phosphate (TSP) and water to clean them, and remove any dust remaining on the walls from sanding. Give the walls a quick rinse with clean water, and when that dries, you're almost ready to paint.

6. The first part of the room you want to paint is the ceiling. You can now get special ceiling paints that go on looking colored so you can see where you have painted, but dry white. This is a great idea, and makes painting a ceiling so much easier.

7. Once the ceiling is done, move onto the dark colors on the walls, followed by the lighter colors. Cut in or paint around the edges of the walls and trim with your sash/cutting brush, doing one wall at a time, and then finishing the wall with the roller. Do one wall at a time, because you need to have what is called a "wet edge" for the paint to dry without visible lines.

Using a Paint Roller

To get a smooth looking paint job with a roller, there is a simple technique. Think of your wall as being divided into rectangles about 4 feet wide. Starting in a corner, make a "W", and then fill in the "W's" gaps by making an "M" over top. Then, spread the paint by going vertically up and down the wall. Don't press hard or you will get bubbles and lines in the paint. Once one rectangle is finished, move onto the next one and make another "W."

You Don't Always Have to Clean Up

Some painting projects can take a few days, and the hassle of cleaning up at the end of a long day can be a major pain. There's good news, though - you don't have to clean up everything to take a break. Simply put your brush or roller into a plastic bag, seal it well and put the bag into the freezer. About an hour before you want to start painting again, take the bag out of the freezer and your brush or roller will be ready to go when you are.

Some Tips on Getting a Good Paint Job

If you are painting wood, any knots in the wood will eventually show through the paint ("burn through"). You can prevent this by sealing the knots with white shellac prior to painting. The shellac is quick drying, prevents the resin in the knot from getting through the paint, and won't show through the finished paint job.

A quick tip about working with cans of paint. When you first open the paint, but before you start to stir it, take a common nail and make a number of holes in the lip of the can. These will allow the paint to flow back into the paint can after you pour some into the roller tray and the smaller can that you use for holding paint for cutting. This really cuts down on the mess.

Now, you are really ready to actually paint something!