

Picture-perfect painting

How to avoid common painting problems

Picking up a paintbrush may seem like a straightforward home-improvement task. In truth, this simplest of home-improvement projects may too often be just a little more complicated than what meets the eye. Poor preparation, bad brushes and just plain lousy technique can turn your painting project from fabulous fresco to something that really misses the masterpiece mark.

Over the last 10 years, we've fielded hundreds of questions to our national radio program from frustrated folks who were trying to solve a myriad of painting problems. Here are a few of the most common culprits and the solutions you need to save time, money and your pride!



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Natural

Stone pattern, naturally.

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Equipment

Get ready, get set - then say go. Getting the right equipment before you start means you won't have to stop in the middle of the job to run back to the hardware store. You'll need ladders, drop cloths to protect sidewalks, floors and shrubbery, long handled paint brushes and rollers, a paint sprayer and tape for trim and detail areas. Also, don't go cheap on the brushes. Better quality brushes deliver a smoother finish and the difference really shows. Keep in mind that brushes are available in both synthetic and natural bristles, also known as "china" bristles. For best results, use synthetic brushes for latex paint and natural bristles for oil-based paint and clear finishes.



FIX

Now that you can see the wood surface underneath the old paint, you should check for rot, warping and insect damage. Replace any damaged boards around windows and doors, and have your local pest control company inspect any damage you think is insect-related. Take the time to inspect all surfaces carefully, being alert for anything out of the ordinary. If there is loose, bubbled or peeling

paint, it usually means there is a leak and you need to check for a water problem. It's critical to not just ignore these symptoms and paint over them. If the underlying cause is not found and fixed, it will only get worse. This is also a great time to fill any holes or caulk any gaps to improve energy efficiency.

Clean

The success or failure of any paint project rides at its roots on one basic need: the paint has to stick. It's not surprising then that much of the effort of any paint project goes into making sure this happens. Paint won't stick to a loose or dirty surface. Between air pollution, mold, mildew, dust and the deteriorating effects of the sun, there's a fair amount of work that must be done to get the surface ready to go.

For exteriors, power washing is a great first step to remove old paint and clean dirty or weathered sources. With a combination of a high-pressure stream and a bleach cleaning solution, you'll knock days off doing the job by hand.

If you are working inside, use liquid sandpaper to remove oil, dirt and grime from trim and wash walls down with a TSP (tri-sodium phosphate) solution which is available at most home centers and hardware stores.



PRIME

Primers are critical coatings that must be applied to provide a firm bond between the substrate and finish coat. Although most do-it-yourself painters look forward to getting to the color coat as soon as possible, skipping the primer step is short-sited. Primer is the "glue" that makes the top coat stick. Skip it and you'll find that the hours of preparation and painting work you put into your projects might have to be repeated long before the paint surface wears out.

Primers are available in both oil- and water-base formulas. For surfaces that are badly stained, or that have had a water leak, oil primers such as Kilz work the best. When using oil-based primers, it is usually a good idea to prime the entire surface you are painting and not just the stained areas. Since oil primers do such a good job of sealing the surface, spot priming may result in an uneven finished coat.

Choices

Exterior paint is different than interior paint, and many homeowners make the mistake of not choosing the right paint for their home. Exterior paint is formulated for color retention, flexibility to withstand expansion and contraction due to weather, resistance to tannin bleed and resistance to mildew. Exterior flat acrylic latex paint is the easiest for do-it-yourselfers to work with. For trim, consider a durable alkyd/oil paint that offers high gloss with good adhesion and stain resistance. When it comes to buying paint, don't buy discount brands. You get what you pay for when it comes to paint and the lower the cost, the shorter life it will have.

Also, always buy a bit more paint than you think you'll need. Surprisingly, many stores are willing to accept returns on unused paint, even if it's a custom color. And having extra means you'll avoid color-matching problems if you run out and need more. Another thing to remember - paint won't adhere if it's below 55 degrees or won't go on smoothly if it's above 90 degrees. >>

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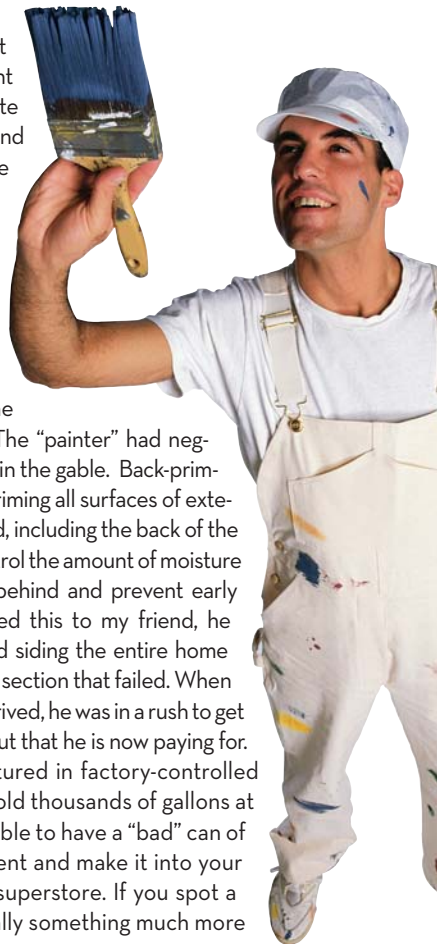
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The Painter

No such thing as bad paint - just bad painters. Blaming the paint for an unacceptable result is quite common. Some years ago, a friend mentioned that he must have had some "bad paint" because the top gable section of wood siding we were repairing had blistered very badly. My buddy had installed the siding and painted the entire home himself about four years earlier. Upon closer examination, the real culprit became obvious. The "painter" had neglected to back-prime the siding in the gable. Back-priming refers to the technique of priming all surfaces of exterior siding before it is assembled, including the back of the board. By doing so, you can control the amount of moisture absorbed by the board from behind and prevent early paint failure. When I mentioned this to my friend, he recalled that he had completed siding the entire home but ran short of material for the section that failed. When the remaining material finally arrived, he was in a rush to get it completed and took a short cut that he is now paying for.

In truth, paint is manufactured in factory-controlled conditions in huge vats that hold thousands of gallons at one time. It is virtually impossible to have a "bad" can of paint exit from this environment and make it into your shopping basket at the local superstore. If you spot a paint failure, the cause is usually something much more common ... like human error!



ADDITIONS

If you can't stand the smell of paint, try adding a paint freshener such as Paint Pourri from Scentco. Just mix the additive in the can of paint for a fresh scent that lasts six to 12 months. If you want no smell at all, try Odor-X Paint Odor Remover. And of course, if you just want to give you room a temporary scent to mask paint odors, try an air freshener

such as Filter Breeze which attaches the scent directly to the air filter.

For more tips on solving painting problems, check the Web sites of paint manufacturers like Behr (behr.com), Benjamin Moore (www.benjaminmoore.com), Kilz (kilz.com) and Sherwin Williams (www.sherwinwilliams.com). Most offer paint problem solvers and color selection tools that help you get the job done. 🏠