HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

INTERIOR PAINTING

For do-it-yourself repairs

TYPES OF PAINT

TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS
Oil-based (alkyd) paint	Forms a surface coating that doesn't allow water or moisture to pass through. Its advantage is that it is durable and can withstand repeated scrubbings. On the other hand, it is slower to apply, tends to make imperfections more visible, and is harder to clean up. It is also more expensive. Oil-based paint is being phased out by manufacturers because of health concerns caused by the volatile organic compounds in this type of paint. You will need to clean up oil-based paint with paint thinner.
Latex-based paint	Attaches to the surface in a way that allows the surface to breathe, and moisture to pass through. It is easy to apply and clean up, and dries faster with less odor; however, it is not as durable as oil-based paint. Latex paint comes in several different degrees of shine – flat, eggshell, semi-gloss, and gloss. The duller the paint, the better it will hide surface imperfections, but the less it will stand up to regular cleaning. Latex can be purchased in an enamel-type mixture, which combines the ease of use of latex paint with the durability of oil-based paint. All latex paints can be cleaned up with warm soapy water.

WHERE EACH TYPE OF PAINT SHOULD BE USED

Oil-based paint is generally used only for woodwork or trim, although it is occasionally used for walls and ceilings in baths, kitchens, or other high-moisture areas. Latex paint is used for ceilings and walls anywhere. Semi-gloss latex enamel is frequently used as an alternative to oil-based paint for woodwork and trim.

> **LATEX OVER OIL – NOT OIL OVER LATEX**
>
> You can apply latex on top of oil, with some preparation, but don't try to apply oil over latex.

PREPARATION

TOOLS NEEDED		
2” or 3” stiff putty knife	Vinyl spackling	Sandpaper
Hammer	Painter's tape	Sanding block
Screwdriver	Tarps	

FIRST, A WORD OF CAUTION

If there is any chipping or peeling paint, or if you are thinking about stripping the old paint off the surface before repainting, inform yourself about the **dangers of lead-based paint** before you proceed. If your house was built before 1978, there is a good chance that lead-based paint was used on the exterior *or interior* of your house. **Using the wrong preparation methods can pose a serious health hazard to your family.** *(See separate handouts on "Controlling Lead-Based Paint during Your Paint Repair Project.")*

Taking these precautions into account, the most important thing you can do to ensure a good finished paint job is to prepare the surfaces properly. Start by removing all switch plates and outlet covers. Then, pull out any nails from the walls. Fill all cracks and nail holes with vinyl spackling and, when dry, sand them smooth.

Take time to protect all the surfaces (like floors and countertops) that you don't want to get paint on. A canvas drop cloth is best (paint can't seep through); mover's blankets are a less expensive alternative. You can use old sheets to protect furniture, but they're not heavy enough to stay put on the floor. Don't use plastic drop cloths on the floor – they will only cause problems – but painter's plastic is good for covering windows, furniture, etc.

As part of your preparation, unscrew and lower – or tape around the edge of – all light fixtures. (Garbage bags work well for covering hanging fixtures.) Give the walls one final check for any bumps or valleys; scrape or sand them off or fill them in, as needed.

NOTE

Don't use an electric sander on uneven plaster, unless it is specially designed to sand drywall. Plaster dust can ruin the motors of other sanders.

Washing the walls and woodwork with TSP, some mild dish soap, or a household cleaner at this point will help the new paint adhere better. If you are painting over latex gloss or semi-gloss paint, or oil-based paint of any sort, wash the surface with Krud Kutter's Gloss-Off™ instead of TSP (apply it with a wash rag with light pressure); the Gloss-Off™ will etch the glossy surface so the new paint can adhere better.

PAINTING PROCEDURES

TOOLS NEEDED		
1-1/2" or 2" angled sash brush	Ladder	9" roller frame and cover
Single-edge razor blades & holder	Roller pan	Extension pole

After you have finished preparing the surfaces, follow these steps:

1 PRIME EVERYTHING, EVERY TIME

No matter how thoroughly you wash your walls, there will always be some residue. Priming is the *only* way to ensure that the new paint will adhere properly.

In most cases, you can use a regular all-purpose primer (such as Gripper™), but check with the sales staff where you purchase your paint about any situations where a specialty product might be helpful. There's a drywall primer/sealer that prepares newly-installed drywall properly, a primer for walls where you have removed wallpaper, a primer that prevents water stains from bleeding through your new paint, etc. Sometimes using a more expensive primer can prevent real problems later on.

If fumes bother you, a relatively inexpensive mask will help with the odor while you're working. For paints or cleaning products with very strong fumes, you can purchase a more expensive respirator with disposable charcoal cartridges. Expect the new paint smell to be noticeable for a day or two after the paint dries.

Follow directions on the can for how long your primer must dry before you apply the paint.

2 CAULK

Caulk all cracks between walls and painted woodwork. Use a paintable white latex caulk; this product is easy to apply, and you can smooth it out and remove any excess with a wet rag (or your finger). Run a bead of caulk just wide enough to seal the crack between the molding and the wall. If your woodwork is unpainted, caulk only if there's a noticeable gap; in that case, protect the wood with painter's tape and run a very narrow bead of colored caulk, close to the color of the wood.

3 PAINT THE CEILING

One coat of paint will usually cover sufficiently. Mix your paint really well, as the pigment can separate out. (If your store-mixed paint has been sitting for more than three days, mix it again.)

Paint around the edges first (this is called “cutting in”), using the sash brush. It doesn't pay to buy a cheap brush; it won't cover with one coat and will leave streaks. You'll pay more for a quality brush, but it will last a long time if properly cleaned.

Dip only the first third of the brush in the paint. Then, gently wipe the excess off on the side of the can. Cover the entire joint where the ceiling and the wall meet. It doesn't matter if you get a little paint on the wall, as you will be covering it later.

After you have cut in, then you're ready to roll the rest of the ceiling. Since latex paint dries in about an hour, you'll need to work steadily – or you'll have a visible ridge where the “wet edge” of the paint you applied first dries before you roll the rest of the wall.

Roller covers can be purchased with several different naps (material thickness) on the surface of the roller cover. The shortest nap is for very smooth walls; the longest naps are for brick or stucco surfaces. Choose the shortest one that will do the job. A 3/8” “smooth” or “semi-smooth” cover will generally work for walls and ceilings.

Pour some paint into the roller pan, roll the roller through it, and then roll the excess off at the top of the pan. Start applying the paint to the ceiling, using an even, gentle pressure and a random pattern (a “V” or “W” pattern that overlaps itself often works well). Using an extension pole with the roller will not only save your back, it will help ensure you're using the right amount of pressure. Even pressure will prevent roller tracks, which will be visible after the paint dries. Let the roller do the work. If you roll slowly, you will be less likely to splatter paint from the roller.

4 PAINT THE WOODWORK

Once the ceiling is finished, you can use the sash brush to paint the door and window trim and the baseboards. You can also use the brush to paint any doors. Hold the brush like you hold a pen. The angle of the brush will aid you in getting into corners and other tight spots. You can use painter's tape to mask around window panes, but don't worry if you slop a little paint on the glass; it's not difficult to scrape the glass with a razor blade after the paint has dried.

Again, one coat will generally be sufficient, although darker colors may take more coats. You'll also use more paint to cover a dark color with a lighter one.

5 TAPE THE WOODWORK

Don't use masking tape; other products will give you a neater result. Blue painter's tape is designed to prevent pulling paint off of woodwork, but “Green” Frog™ tape is even better; it has a chemical in the adhesive that causes any latex paint that gets beneath it to gel (so you always end up with a clean edge). For delicate surfaces, such as woodwork that's been newly painted, you might consider “Yellow” Frog™ tape. It's a bit more expensive, but won't ruin paint that hasn't yet cured.

Position your tape as close to the wall as possible, while staying on the wood. Run a “5-in-1” tool along the surface of the tape to smooth it out and press it securely in place.

6 PAINT THE WALLS

After finishing the ceiling, start on the walls. Plan on at least two coats, regardless of what it says on the can. (With less expensive paints, you'll need additional coats.) If you are using a different color of latex paint on the walls than you used on the ceiling, you can wash out the roller sleeve and then re-use it for the walls. You can also wash out the roller pans, or you can use inexpensive roller pan liners, which you change with each new paint color.

Before you paint, tape along the joint at the top of the wall to prevent slopping paint on the ceiling. Start by cutting in all the corners and where the walls meet the ceiling, around all window and door trim, and at the baseboards. Then, roll the paint on the wall like you did on the ceiling. (If you are using flat paint, you can cut in around the whole room before painting the main body of the walls; however, with gloss or semi-gloss paint, do one wall at a time to make sure the edges of the paint are wet where they meet.) Start at the top and work your way down. Let each coat dry for the time specified on the can before applying your next coat.

REMOVE TAPE RIGHT AWAY

Remove any tape you put on as soon as you finish painting – don't wait until the paint dries.

If you follow this “order of painting,” you can expect pretty good results, even the first time. And, each time you paint after that, you'll get better and better.

Home Repair Resource center

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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