

How to Paint and Decorate Your Home

121 Great Home Painting and Decorating Ideas

By Judith Brown

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1. General Painting Tips

Prevent drips when painting a drawer front by removing the drawer and painting it face up.

Keep paint off window panes by masking pane edges with tape. If you have no tape) use strips of newspaper dampened so that they will stick to the glass. Peel off the paper as you finish each frame.

To avoid smearing when painting cabinets) paint the inside of the cabinets first. Then paint the tops) bottoms) and sides of doors before painting the door fronts. If you proceed in this sequence) you won't have to reach over already painted areas. Protect doorknobs when painting them by wrapping them with aluminum foil or by slipping plastic sandwich bags over them.

Glue paper plates to paint can bottoms to serve as drip catchers. The plates move along with the cans and are more convenient than newspapers.

When painting stairs) paint alternate steps so that you'll have a way out. When those dry) paint the others. Or) paint one side of each step at a time. Use the other side for foot traffic until the painted side dries) then reverse the process.

Where appearance isn't important, steps will be safer if you mix in a little sand when painting them (so that they'll be less slippery) and edge them with luminous paint (so that they'll be more visible).

If your wall-switch cover plate was painted over along with the wall and you now need to remove it) avoid flaking or chipping any paint by cutting carefully around the plate's edge with a single-edge razor blade. Remove the screws and lift off the plate.

If you don't want to-or can't -remove hardware when painting adjacent areas) coat the hardware with petroleum jelly before painting.

You'll be able to wipe off any paint that gets on the metal by accident.

You'll be able to reach to paint the ceiling if you stand on a scaffold made by laying a wide plank across two sturdy chairs.

Before painting a ceiling) turn off the light fixture, loosen it) and let it hang down. Then wrap it in a plastic bag for protection against paint splatters.

If the smell of fresh paint bothers you, you can eliminate it from a room in one day by leaving either a dish of ammonia or vinegar in the room, or onion slices in a bowl of water.

To cut the smell when you're decorating with oil-based paint, stir a spoonful of vanilla extract into each can of paint.

Don't wipe your paintbrush against the lip of the paint can. The lip will soon fill up with paint which will run down the side and drip off. Use a coffee can to hold the paint instead.

Wrinkling occurs when too much paint is applied or when the paint is too thick. You can correct wrinkling easily by sanding the surface and brushing on paint of a lighter consistency.

If you want to be able to use a previous coat of exterior paint as a base for a new coat, the old paint should be no more than 5 years old. If you wait longer than that you'll have a major job of scraping, sanding, and spackling.

Artificial light darkens color, so your paint will look lighter in the daylight. If in doubt when at the paint store, take the container outside to examine the color.

All paint dries to a lighter shade than the one you see when it's first applied to the surface you're painting.

Color can saturate your eyes. When mixing paint, look away at a white surface for several minutes to allow your eyes to adjust so that you can judge the color accurately.

To get the correct "feel" for spray painting and to determine the correct spray distance from the object to be painted, first experiment with a sheet of cardboard as the target area.

Make a paint holder from a coat hanger to keep your hands free when painting. Open the hanger and bend it in half; then bend it into an "S" to hook over the ladder and hold your paint can.

To avoid painting a window shut, gently slide the sash up and down as the paint hardens but before it forms a seal.

If you are working on a ladder in front of a closed door, lock the door so that no one can inadvertently swing the door open and send you sprawling.

Record how much paint is required to cover each room by writing the amount on the back of a light-switch plate. When you remove the switch plate before repainting, you'll be reminded of how much fresh paint you need.

Do tiny spots need a paint touch-up? If you use cotton swabs instead of a brush, you won't waste paint and you won't have to clean a brush.

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2. Outdoor Painting

When positioning a ladder against a house or tree, it is safest to position it so that the distance from the base of the ladder to the house or tree is one quarter of the ladder's extended length.

Otherwise the ladder may fall forward or tip backward.

Spring is the ideal time to paint the exterior of a house. Do it as soon as the weather turns warm enough, but before the temperature gets too hot. In very hot weather paint dries too quickly and leaves marks where strokes were overlapped.

When painting the outside of your house, fold newspapers over the tops of doors and then close them. You won't paint the doors shut.

Don't use a flame to soften alligatored paint. The flame can shoot into a crack and ignite the sheathing.

Paint will not bond on a surface wet from morning dew or on a prime coat not thoroughly dry. And without proper bonding, paint will peel.

Be sure to wait for dew to dry before painting.

If using an oil-based paint on an area that has suffered mildew, add a mildew inhibitor to the paint. (This isn't necessary with water-based paints, which don't contain the oil that fungus feeds on.)

Painting gutters is easy, but downspouts can be tricky. To protect the interior of the downspout against rust, drop a string with a weight on it down through the spout, and tie a sponge to the bottom end of the string. Use a sponge that must be compressed to fit inside the spout. Using plenty of paint, soak the sponge, and then pull on the string to squeeze the sponge up through the spout. The paint will spread evenly from bottom to top as the sponge goes up.

To prepare old wood for paint it's not necessary to remove the old paint. Simply seal all knots with thinned shellac and sand when dry. If the knot is loose, tighten it with wood caulking.

After the caulking has dried, coat the spot with shellac, and then sand.

To avoid marring a paint job when leaning a ladder against clapboard siding, cover the top ends of the ladder with heavy woolen socks. The paint will remain unmarked.

If paint is blistering on hollow porch posts or columns, trapped moisture could be the problem.

Cure it by boring small ventilating holes at the top and bottom of each post or column.

Don't use a sander with a revolving disc to remove paint from wood siding. It will gouge the surface.

Use a wire brush to remove loose and peeling paint from curved metal surfaces. A scraper or putty knife will take such paint off flat surfaces.

Use steel wool on rust spots, and a mirror to inspect the undersides.

Plan to trim or prune shrubbery or trees so branches don't touch painted exterior surfaces. The undersides of leaves hold moisture long after a rain, and prolonged moisture causes paint to blister and peel.

When painting the exterior of your house, protect nearby shrubs from paint splatters by covering them with drop cloths or old sheets.

Raw metal is coated with a protective, oily film that keeps paint from adhering properly, so it's best to paint galvanized metal after it has weathered for at least 6 months. If you prefer not to wait for the metal to weather, strip the film by washing the metal with pure white vinegar. Rinse the metal with water and allow to dry before painting.

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3. Cleanup and Storage

Before capping leftover paint for storage, mark the label at the level of the remaining paint so you'll know at a glance-without opening the can-how much is left inside. Label the cans by rooms so there's no question which paint to reorder or use for touch-ups.

For easy cleanup of your paint tray, line the tray with a plastic bag before pouring in your paint. After the job's done, you can discard the bag without having to clean the roller tray.

To avoid having to clean a paint roller pan, press a sheet of aluminum foil into it before use.

When you're finished, simply wrap up the foil and dispose of it.

Why buy new paint thinner when you can reuse the old? Here's how: Pour paint thinner into an empty coffee can. After you've cleaned your brushes, cover the can tightly and let it stand for several days. When paint from the brushes settles

to the bottom as sediment, drain off the "clean" thinner into another can and store for reuse.

When you buy a new oil paint brush, soak it for a day in a can of linseed oil before using it. The brush will last longer and be easier to clean.

To clean a paint brush without making a mess of your hands, pour solvent into a strong, clear plastic bag, and insert the brush. Your hands will stay clean as you work the solvent into the bristles through the plastic.

If you store a partially used can of paint upside down, "skin" won't form on the surface of the paint. (Be sure the lid is tight.)

To clean a paint roller after use, roll it as dry as possible, first on the newly painted surface and then on several sheets of newspaper. Then slide the roller from its support and clean it with water or a solvent, depending on the type of paint used.

If you must leave a paint brush for a short time and don't want to clean it, wrap it in foil or a plastic bag to keep it soft and pliable. Put it in the freezer to save it for a longer time.

Leftover paint that is lumpy or contains shreds of paint "skin" can be strained through window screening.

To keep a brush as soft as new, clean it and then dip it in a final rinse containing fabric softener.

An empty coffee can with a plastic lid makes a perfect container for soaking brushes.

Just make two slits in the center of the plastic lid to form an "X," push the brush handle up through the "X," and replace the lid. The lid seals the can so the solvent can't evaporate, and the brush is suspended without the bristles resting on the bottom.

White paint won't yellow if you stir in a drop of black paint.

A paste-type paint remover will remove paint spots from brick.

You can remove paint splatters from your hair by rubbing the spots with baby oil.

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4. Wallpaper and Wall Coverings

If you're planning to paper all walls in a room, choose the least conspicuous area as your starting-finishing point. It's almost inevitable that the pattern won't match perfectly as you return to the start.

If there are stubborn grease spots on walls that you're going to paper, seal them with clear nail polish or shellac so that the grease won't soak through the new wallpaper.

To make wallpaper hanging easier, a right handed person should work from left to right and a left-handed person from right to left.

Tint wallpaper paste slightly with food coloring so that you can see exactly where you've applied it.

Save time when applying wallpaper paste by using a short-napped paint roller.

To eliminate a bubble in wallpaper after the paste has dried, take a razor blade and slit the blister twice across its center, forming an "X." Peel back the slit's four tips, dab paste under them, press down, and smooth with a seam roller or the back of a spoon.

Wallpaper a ceiling with the strips positioned crosswise-they're shorter and more manageable. Accordion-fold each strip, pasted area against pasted area, and unfold it as you go along, supporting the paper with one hand and smoothing it onto the ceiling with the other.

After wallpapering a room where there'll be a lot of moisture-such as a kitchen or bathroom-cover all seams with clear varnish to help guard against peeling.

When papering over wall anchors or places where you plan to reposition shelves or pictures, insert toothpicks in holes left by screws or picture hooks. As you cover these sections, force the toothpick points through the paper to mark reinstallation points for screws or hooks.

Save time when hanging the wallpaper itself by smoothing it with a clean, dry paint roller. If you attach the roller to a long handle, you can reach the ceiling or the tops of walls without climbing a ladder.

Use a squeegee to eliminate bubbles and wrinkles in vinyl wall coverings.

To eliminate a bubble in freshly hung wallpaper-while the paste is still wet-puncture the blister with a sharp needle or pin. Press the blister inward from its edges toward the puncture, squeezing out excess paste. Wipe this excess off with a damp sponge, and then press the area flat with a seam roller or the back of a spoon.

Repairing Wallpaper

It's a good idea to save wallpaper for patching. Let it "weather" and fade at the same rate as the paper on the wall by taping a piece or two on a closet wall. If you do this, it will correspond in color density as well as pattern to the paper already on the wall.

If you lack wallpaper scraps for patching, try touching up the design in worn areas. Carefully use felt-tip pens to restore rubbed or faded colors.

If you don't have a seam roller to use to tame a loose wallpaper seam, rub the seam with the back of a spoon. White glue can substitute for wallpaper paste.

To repair a damaged wallpaper section, tear -don't cut-a patch from a piece that's been "weathered." Because less-defined torn edges blend imperceptibly with paper already on the wall, the patch will be virtually invisible. Note: Don't remove damaged wallpaper before placing a patch on it. Paste the patch directly over the damaged surface.

Removing Wallpaper

When preparing to remove old wallpaper, soak it first with very hot water applied with a paint roller; add a touch of detergent to the water to hasten the process. If the paper is foil, or vinyl-coated, score its surface so water can penetrate.

When removing old wallpaper-with a steamer, save the ceiling for last. As you work on the walls, steam rising from the applicator will loosen the ceiling paper. Much of it will start sagging from its own weight, and peeling it off will be easy.

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5. Other Wall Coverings

If you're stapling fabric to a wall and you want to mask the staples at the top and bottom, glue a band of fabric-or even a wide, contrasting ribbon-over these seams. You also can cover the staples with molding strips.

When paneling a room, let the panels acclimate to the room's humidity for 48 hours before positioning them. This helps prevent them from being installed too tightly or too loosely.

When applying wood paneling to a way you can attach panels directly to the studs. However, panels attached this way tend to give a little and are not as soundproof as those installed over either a plywood or a gypsum board backing.

When you're installing wood panels, first lean them against the wall as you think they should be placed. This gives you a chance to arrange the wood graining in the manner that pleases you most. When they're positioned the way you want them, number the panels for reference and proceed with the project.

Instead of carrying large wallboard sheets into the house and possibly damaging them when navigating awkward corners, measure and cut them to fit before bringing them inside.

To save your arm muscles when installing ceiling wallboard, construct two "dead-man" supports. These consist of z x 4s of the proper-floor-to-ceiling length, including T-bars at their tops. They effortlessly support the panels while you do the final positioning and securing.

When using a hand saw or a table saw to cut a wood panel, cut the panel with the face up.

When using a hand power saw, cut the panel with the face down.

Do you want to discourage nails from "popping" out of wallboard? Drive them in pairs, spaced 2 inches apart. Each strengthens the holding power of the other. If you're driving nails into a stud where 2 wallboard edges butt up against each other, stagger the double nailing on each side of the interface.

To help absorb noise, install acoustical tiles on doors to playrooms. You could also reduce noise in your home by using such tile to line the rooms or closets that house central heating and air conditioning units.

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6. Wall Repairs and Ceramic Tile

A saucepan lid makes a good container for joint compound, since the lid's knob lets you hold the "bowl" easily during application. (When you've finished, make sure you rinse out the lid before any residue hardens. Other easy-to-hold containers are a bathroom plunger or half of a hollow rubber ball.

To prevent a toggle bolt from slipping into a wall cavity before a hang-up is in place, insert a washer under the bolt's head. (The hole needed for the bolt is normally larger than the bolt's head.)

To hold a heavy bolt in a masonry wall, taper a dowel and drive it into a small hole. Then drive the bolt into the dowel.

If a screw hole in the wall has worn-down grooves, stuff the hole with a cotton ball soaked in white glue, and let it dry for ~4 hours. You'll then be able to insert a screw securely using a screw- driver.

To patch a small hole in drywall you can use a tin can lid covered by a plaster patch. Thread a wire in and back out through two holes in the can lid, and then slide the lid behind the wall through horizontal slits cut out from each side of the hole.

Pull the lid flat on the inside, and hold it in place while you apply plaster.

A beer can opener makes a good tool for cutting loose plaster out of a wall before patching a large crack. Use the pointed end of the opener to undercut and widen the opening.

It will be easier to fill a large hole in the wall if you first jam a piece of wallboard into the hole, and then mar the wallboard's surface so it's rough.

The spackle will adhere tightly to the wallboard piece and won't sink in and require further applications.

It's best to fill wide cracks in plaster from the inside out, pressing fresh plaster in with a putty knife or a trowel.

Adding a tablespoon of white vinegar to the water when mixing patching plaster will keep the compound from drying too quickly, allowing you more time to work.

You'll be able to remove a damaged ceramic tile easily if you first drill a hole through its center and score an "X" across it with a glass cutter. Then chisel out the pieces.

To fit a ceramic tile around the stem of a shower pipe, cut the tile in half and then cut semicircles out of each half with tile nippers.

When replacing an individual ceramic wall tile, it helps to tape it securely to surrounding tiles until its mastic dries.

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7. Hanging Pictures and Mirrors

Take the guesswork out of arranging several pictures on the wall. Spread a large sheet of wrapping paper or several taped-together newspapers on the floor and experiment with frame

positions. When you decide on a pleasing grouping, outline the frames on the paper, tape the paper to the wall, and drive hooks through the paper into the wall. Then remove the paper and hang the pictures.

Sometimes a picture that was positioned correctly won't hang straight. Wrap masking tape around the wire on both sides of the hook so that the wire can't slip. Or install parallel nails and hooks a short distance apart; 2 hooks are better than 1 for keeping pictures in their places. Squares of double-faced tape affixed to the frame's 2 lower back corners also will keep pictures from moving. (If you don't have double-faced tape, make 2 loops with masking tape, sticky side out. Apply to each of the lower back corners and press the picture against the wall.)

Picture hanging can be frustrating if you simply try to "eyeball" the right spot to put the hook. Instead, place a picture exactly where you want it the first time with the following method. Cut a sheet of paper to the exact size of the frame.

Position the pattern on the back of the picture, pull up taut the wire the picture will hang from, and mark the inverted "V" point on the pattern.

Adjust the pattern on the wall, and then poke through it to mark the 'V' point on the wall. If you nail the hook there, the picture will hang precisely where you wanted it.

If the picture isn't too heavy, another timesaving method is to hold the picture itself by its wire and decide where you want it positioned.

Wet a fingertip and press it on the wall to mark the wire's inverted "V" point. The finger print mark will stay wet long enough for you to drive a nail and hook on target.

Don't lose a perfect picture grouping when you repaint a room-insert toothpicks in the hook holes and paint right over them; when the paint dries, remove the toothpicks and re-hang your pictures.

To prevent a plaster wall from crumbling when driving in a nail and hook, first form an "X" over the nail spot with 2 strips of masking tape or transparent tape.

If you're hanging a picture from a molding but don't like the look of exposed picture wire, substitute nylon fishing line. The transparent nylon does a disappearing act that allows your picture to star on its own.

Hang heavy objects without special anchors by driving nails directly into the wooden studs behind walls. There are several ways to locate studs. You can tap a wall gently with your knuckles or a hammer. A wall sounds hollow between studs; solid on top of them. Or, move an electric razor (turned on) along a wall; a razor registers a different tone over studs. If nails were used to attach drywall to studs, a magnet will indicate the location of the nails, and, therefore, the studs.

When hanging a mirror with screws that go through mounting holes in the glass, don't tighten the screws all the way. Leave enough play to prevent the mirror from cracking if the wall shifts.

Hang mirrors to reflect you but not the sun; some mirror backings are adversely affected by direct sunlight.

Sometimes a picture that has been hanging for a while will leave darkish outlines on the wall because dust and dirt have collected against the frame. To prevent such build-up, allow better air circulation by holding pictures slightly away from the wall with thumb tacks pressed firmly into the backs of their frames. You can get the same result by fixing small tabs of self-sticking foam weather-stripping to the picture backing.

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