

THE ORGANIZER

The Paint Primer

A start-to-finish guide to the easiest, fastest, smartest way to **paint a room**

YOU'VE ALWAYS KNOWN that a fresh paint job is the ultimate quick fix for any room—a big makeover for a small cost. But walking through the aisles of a paint center can be overwhelming enough to stall a project before it's even begun. You don't know which supplies you need, much less how to apply the paint or how to make sure the color you like in the store will look good on your walls. After consulting with a score of painting experts, *Real Simple* has assembled the essential strategies and tips for eliminating the guesswork—and then painting a room like a pro.

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“If in real estate the key is location, location, location, then in painting, it's preparation, preparation, preparation.”

Melissa Birdsong,
director of trend
forecasting and
design at Lowe's

The Painter's Tool Kit

Here is everything you need to paint a wall—or four. Pick up supplies from your local hardware store beforehand, so that on painting day you'll be ready to roll first thing in the morning.

1. ROLLER FRAME

The new Shur-Line Twist N Reach roller frame (877-748-7546 for store locations) has a built-in adjustable extension pole for reaching high spots. Cost: \$9.

2. FIVE-GALLON BUCKET

For big jobs requiring multiple gallons of the same color, don't use a roller tray. Instead, work like a professional and "box the paint," mixing all the cans in one bucket to keep the color consistent. Comes with a lid for storing leftovers. Cost: about \$4.

3. SCREEN

Place the screen inside the five-gallon bucket to wipe excess paint off the roller. Cost: about \$3.

4. ROLLER TRAY

Use a rigid plastic or metal tray for smaller projects. Cost: about \$3.

5. STIRRER

Always stir paint before applying. Cost: free with paint purchase.

6. ROLLER COVER

For most interior walls, a 3/8-inch nap provides the best finish. Cost: about \$4 each.

7. BLUE TAPE

Tape around trim with Ace Brand Clean Release Masking Tape (www.acehardware.com for locations). Cost: \$5.50.

8. HOLE FILLER

Dab Nail Hole Filler (www.homedepot.com for locations) into small holes in the wall. It's faster than spackling. Cost: \$4.

9. SCREWDRIVER

Remove switch plates and lighting fixtures before painting.

10. TAPE MEASURE

Measure walls so you'll know how much paint to buy. One gallon typically covers 400 square feet.



11. SPONGE

Wash walls with a mild dish-washing detergent before priming. Cost: about \$2.

12. PRIMER

Use an interior-exterior primer with a stain blocker, such as Zinsser Bulls Eye 1-2-3 Primer Sealer Stain-Killer (Lowe's Home Improvement Ware-

house, 800-445-6937 for store locations). Cost: about \$16 a gallon.

13. TRAY LINER

Using a disposable liner with a roller tray saves time during cleanup. Cost: under \$1.

14. POURING SPOUT

Attach the Shur-Line Paint

Pourer (Lowe's) to a gallon can and pour without any mess. Cost: about \$2.

15. ANGLED SASH PAINTBRUSH

Use a two-inch angled synthetic brush on trim. The Shur-Grip brush (877-748-7546 for stores) has a cover that keeps it wet between uses. Cost: \$9.

16. PLASTIC DROP CLOTH

Safeguard furniture with plastic. Cost: about \$3.

17. CANVAS DROP CLOTH

Protect your floor with a 4-by-15-foot reusable canvas drop cloth, which is less slippery than plastic. Cost: about \$20.

Six Steps to Painting a Room

Once you've properly prepped your walls, the actual painting is easy. Follow these steps in order, and don't skip any of them. Wait until the first coat dries before deciding whether you need a second one.



1. Clean walls.

Remove dust, dirt, and grease spots (which can ruin a smooth finish) with water, a little mild dishwashing detergent, and a cellulose sponge. Rinse walls with clean water to remove the soap residue.



2. Tape the trim and window and door frames.

Be sure to use painter's blue tape, which can be applied up to a week ahead. Remove tape immediately after painting, before the wall dries, so you don't peel off any paint with it.



3. Prime the walls.

It's a common myth that walls that have been painted many times don't need to be primed. In fact, primer helps maximize the sheen and coverage of paint and gives the finish coat a more uniform appearance.



4. Brush where you can't roll.

Brush on paint around trim and in the corners of walls, where your roller can't reach, with a two-inch angled brush. Extend out two to three inches from windows, doors, and moldings.



5. Use the W technique to paint walls.

For efficiency, start in the corner of a wall and roll on a three-by-three-foot W pattern, then fill it in without lifting the roller. Continue in sections until you're finished. Paint one wall at a time.



6. Paint the trim last.

When the walls are completely dry, tape where the trim meets the wall. Paint the moldings and the door and window frames with a two-inch angled brush.

Tricks and Time-savers

Painting a room will feel like less of a chore if you're careful about every stage of the process. Here are a few ways to make sure you don't waste time, energy, or paint.



1. Dip it.

Don't dip a brush more than a third of the way into the paint. Excess paint won't speed the process, but it will clog the base of the bristles, making cleanup more difficult and shortening the life of the brush.



2. Clean it.

Clean the rim of the paint can with a screwdriver wrapped in a rag. If you have paint in the groove, you won't be able to seal the top tightly.



3. Label it.

Cover the open can with plastic wrap to create a clean seal, then pound on the lid with a hammer. Dab a little paint on the lid with a rag to remind you of the color. Write the paint's name and number on the lid with a permanent marker so you can reorder if necessary.

Color Confidence

Do you agonize over color cards in the paint section of your hardware store? Here are strategies for finding a color you'll love.

■ **Bring it home.** Don't make a decision based on how a color looks in the store. Take the card home, cut out the chip you like, and stick it on the wall to see it in your room's lighting. Glidden Paint (available at Home Depot) offers peel-and-stick color chips that work like Post-its, safely sticking to walls.

■ **Audition a color.** The best way to choose a color is to try out a sample. Invest in a quart and apply the color to a two-by-two-foot piece of foam board (available at paint centers and art-supply stores). Position the panel in several parts of the room at different times of the day to gauge the changing light. Farrow & Ball (www.farrow-ball.com), a British manufacturer of traditional paints now available in the United States, sells \$5 pots of paint that cover

about 10 square feet, which will let you try out a color without buying a full quart. Devine Color paint (www.devinecolor.com) offers two-ounce paint pouches for color sampling.

■ **Make it match (no extra charge).** You can have paint custom mixed to match a piece of fabric, carpeting, or wallpaper at any Ace Hardware, Home Depot, or Lowe's store. The sample must be a flat item that is of uniform color and is at least 1/2 inch square.

■ **Consult a computer.** In one of Home Depot's Color Solution Centers, you can use interactive software to "virtually" paint a model room so you can see how different colors will



look. Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse also has kiosks in its Signature Colors Design Centers, where you can experiment with more than a thousand colors from six designer palettes. For an even better sense of how a color will look, both Glidden Paint and Lowe's sell CD-ROMs that let you input digital images of your own room. (Or if you have Web access, go to www.homedepot.com or www.lowes.com to use the free software application.)

■ **Narrow it down.** If you're overwhelmed by the thousands of colors typically offered by big paint companies, try a boutique line, such as Farrow & Ball or Devine Color. They both offer a limited range of beautiful colors, almost all of which will look good on your walls.



4. Seal it.

Store cans upside down to create a tight seal around the lid. Be sure to store latex paints where they won't freeze, since they are water-based.

5. Bag it.

No time to clean? Place your roller cover in a Ziploc bag and store it in the refrigerator or a cool spot during painting breaks (or overnight). Be sure there's no excess air in the bag.

Painting Tips

- If your ceiling needs a fresh coat, paint it first, before doing your walls. Try Ace Brand Simply Magic Ceiling Paint (\$18, www.acehardware.com for store locations). The paint goes on light blue to let you see where you've applied it, then dries to a pure white in 24 hours.
- Ask a paint store to tint the primer toward your finish color if you're using a dark color. Tinting the primer will reduce the number of coats you'll need for good coverage.
- If you're painting on a humid day, do not leave the windows wide open, because the paint will take longer to dry. Instead, crack a window and turn a fan on to circulate air.

A Glossary of Gloss Use this crib sheet to pick the best finish for your needs.

Paint Finish	Where to Use	Touch-ups and Scrubbability
FLAT/MATTE	Best choice for walls with many imperfections. Use on ceilings and bedroom, dining-room, and living-room walls. Do not use in the kitchen or bathrooms.	Easy to touch up but hard to clean. Premium flat paint, such as Benjamin Moore Regal Matte Finish or California Paints Super-Scrub Matte Finish, has better washability.
EGGSHELL	This low-sheen finish is a great choice for living-room or bedroom walls. Do not use in high-traffic areas, like hallways, because the delicate finish mars easily.	A washable finish that can be touched up.
SATIN	A silky, pearl-like sheen. Good choice for woodwork as well as walls in the family room, children's rooms, laundry room, kitchen, and bathrooms.	A warm finish that's scrubbable. More difficult to touch up because any difference in sheen will be apparent.
SEMIGLOSS	A popular choice for trim and moldings. Ideal for kitchen and bathroom walls because it is more resistant to humidity and withstands stains, chipping, and scuffing.	Durable and easy to clean. The most scrubbable sheen for walls. More difficult to touch up because the difference in sheen may show up more easily.
GLOSS	Rarely used on walls because it shows imperfections like a mirror does. Typically used on woodwork, trim, moldings. Works well only for surfaces that are truly smooth.	The most durable finish and the easiest to clean. Most difficult to touch up because the difference in sheen may show up more easily.