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## How to Achieve a Perfect Exterior Paint Job

**Painting the exterior of your home is a big job that costs thousands in the hands of a professional. But you can save money if you invest the time to do it yourself correctly.**



Be lead-safe by wearing a mask, spraying water on the old paint as you scrape it off, and collecting the debris as you go

Old wood siding, fast becoming a dinosaur in new construction, regularly needs the protection of a new coat of paint.

A professional will charge you between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to paint a 15-20 square, two-story house. But you can do it yourself in a few weekends for the cost of paint and supplies.

A good paint job can last 10 years. The key is proper preparation. Here are 10 steps to take to make sure your exterior paint job looks great, adds value to your home, and lasts a long time.

### Step 1: Get the lead out

Do-it-yourselfers are not obligated to follow regulations for lead-safe practices, as professional paint contractors must. But if your home was built before 1978, when lead paint was banned for residential use, you should protect yourself and your neighbours from airborne lead particles.

The first step is to test for lead paint: Call your local Independent Property Inspector to arrange this. If tests prove positive for lead, keep paint dust to a minimum by taking the following precautions.

- Lay plastic drop cloths and collect scrapings.
- Clean area with a HEPA vacuum.
- Wear masks and Tyvek suits.
- Dispose of all materials at an approved hazardous materials site.

### Step 2: Wash the exterior

Mildew thrives under fresh paint, which won't adhere well to dirty, grimy, spore-sporting exterior walls. So wash your home's exterior before painting.

Use a mix of water and a phosphate-free House Cleaner (\$15 per 4 litres) and Mildew Killer Concentrate (\$8.50 for 100 millilitres).

You can hand-apply the solution with a sponge, which will take forever and many trips up and down the ladder. Or, hire a pro to pressure wash siding—not a task for an amateur, who can damage siding by pushing water under boards. (Cost varies by location: \$350 to \$750 for a professional to pressure wash the exterior of a 15-20 square house.)

### Step 3: Scrape off loose paint

Once weatherboards are dry, remove loose, flaking paint.

A handheld scraper is usually the best tool for the job, though you can also use a hot-air gun or infrared paint stripper. Never use an open-flame torch, which can easily start a fire and is illegal in most states unless you have a permit.

To work lead-safe, wear a mask and Tyvek suit, spray water on the paint as you scrape, and collect the debris.

#### **Step 4: Sand rough spots**

A pad sander or random-orbit fitted with 80-grit sandpaper will smooth out any remaining rough spots. Take care not to push so hard that you leave sander marks in the wood.

To be lead safe, use sanders fitted with HEPA filters.

#### **Step 5: Fill and repair**

After washing, scraping, and sanding your wood siding, step back and inspect what you've uncovered—holes, dings, and chips.

Fill minor holes or dings in the siding with a patching putty or compound such as Builders Bog.

If you've got a major rot problem, summon a carpenter to replace the bad wood. Also, fix drainage problems that cause water to pool and promote rot.

#### **Step 6: Apply primer**

Apply primer immediately after preparing wood siding.

White, gray, or tinted primer provides an even base for topcoats to adhere to, and a uniform canvas from which to survey your work. Small gaps in joints and around doors, windows, and other spots where horizontals meet verticals will all stand out in high relief, showing where you need to fill in with caulk.

If you're painting over bare wood or existing latex paint, then latex primer is fine. But if you're painting over multiple coats of oil-based paint, it's best to stick with a new coat of oil-based primer.

#### **Step 7: Caulk all joints**

Siliconised or top-of-the line polyurethane acrylic caulks give paint jobs a smooth, pleasing look. But the benefits aren't purely aesthetic. Tight joints also prevent air leaks and block water penetration.

#### **Step 8: Choose the right paint**

Painting with water-based acrylic latex is so much easier than dealing with oil-based paints. Latex paint:

- Applies easily
- Dries quickly
- Cleans up with soap and water

If your house already sports an oil-based paint, which is more durable than latex, you'll have to stick with it.

Choose finishes carefully. As a rule, the higher the sheen, the better the paint is at blocking the sun's damaging rays. Satin is fine for shingles or weatherboards, but you'll want gloss paint to protect high-traffic parts of a house, such as window casings, porches, and doorframes.

#### **Step 9: Apply top coat(s)**

Less is more when it comes to applying top coats. More layers can result in paint flaking off through the years; less paint bonds better to layers beneath.

If you're going from a white house to yellow or cream, you might be able to get by with one coat. Going from a light to a dark house, and vice versa, usually requires two coats.

#### **Step 10: Practice good maintenance**

You can extend the life of a good paint job by:

- Inspecting the caulk every year and replacing any that's cracked or missing.
- Removing mold or mildew.
- Washing stains from nesting birds and pollen.
- Touching up blisters and peels before they spread.

To find out more and get your home inspected call your local independent property inspector on **1800 17 88 22** or email [info@ipi.net.au](mailto:info@ipi.net.au)

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