

Exterior Painting

I recently received an e-mail message from a powerful TMPeople kingpin asking if I'm just about finished with a home-repair article for the next issue. That's code for "it's time to get started." But it's a perfect autumn weekend – the temperature is in the high 60's, the sun is out, and the sky is that beautiful bright blue that you only see in the fall, that is to say a perfect day to lie on the couch in a dark room and watch football! But no couch time for me; there are so many things that I have to get done before winter, and the first one I should tackle before it gets too cold is outdoor painting. Fall is a great time to paint. Not too hot, but warm enough that the paint will dry in just an hour or two. And most football games are on the radio anyway.

In the olden days, long before the Madrid Protocol complicated our lives, paint was simply a concoction of linseed oil and pigment. Linseed oil is made from pressed flaxseed and is useful as a paint ingredient because it hardens when exposed to oxygen. Another important characteristic of linseed oil is that cattle will walk up to a house which has been freshly painted with a linseed oil-based paint and lick it; flaxseed is for cows, food. While having your house or bathroom licked by cattle does engender a certain charm, there are other reasons to use linseed oil paint. For example, wood treated with linseed oil paint has a tendency to develop spectacular colonies of mildew. So you could paint your porch with a

linseed oil-based paint of any color and watch it slowly turn black. But wait, there's more! Linseed oil has another interesting property: the ability to make things burst spontaneously into flames! For reasons I can't fathom, other types of paint have been developed in recent years to replace linseed oil-based paint.

Linseed oil in paint has been replaced with synthetic resins called alkyds. Although less cattle-friendly, alkyd paints dry faster, chalk less, tolerate sunlight better, and are more resistant to mildew than linseed oil-based paints. When people talk about oil paint today what they mean is alkyd paint.



Sometime during the Truman administration latex paints were developed based I assume, on Roswell technology. These water-based paints are referred to as latex paints although they are actually made of vinyl and acrylics. Sixty years after they were introduced people still ask which is better for exterior painting. [SPOILER ALERT: latex].

Latex paints, unlike oil-based paints, don't undergo a chemical transformation as they dry. They just dry. Latex paint dries to a strong, thin, flexible film which is thinner than the film formed by an oil-based paint, but it is more durable and deteriorates less rapidly. Early latex paints had problems. The paint deteriorated in sunlight, turned yellow, and fell off, thus mimicking the symptoms of certain venereal diseases. Over the years these problems with latex paint have been solved and the performance of latex paint has eclipsed that of oil-based paints. Latex paint is faster drying, tolerates sunlight better, and is more resistant to mildew than oil-based paints. It also holds its color better, resists blistering, is easier to apply, gives off no toxic fumes as it dries, and, probably most important, can be cleaned up with soap and water. Water-based paints expand and contract with the exterior wood – a good thing. They also allow water vapor generated inside the house to pass through the paint film. Oil-based paints on the other hand, dry to an inflexible coating that blocks moisture. The result can be telltale cracks in the paint as wood expands, and paint blisters as trapped moisture tries to find a way out.

Water-based paints are also gentler on the environment because they are lower in volatile organic compounds. But does all this mean that oil-based paint should never be used at all? When asked to recommend a type of paint, the director of the Paint Technology Center for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (yes, the Army has a paint technology center) says, "I always ask about the previous paint job. If it worked fine, I suggest using what was there before." Also, if you are priming bare wood that contains knots that you want to cover, you should use an oil-based primer; it will cover the knots, whereas latex usually won't.

As with all painting, surface preparation is critical. If the surface you're painting is dirty, chalky, or deteriorated, the paint film won't anchor itself to the surface and will soon peel off. The most time-consuming and tedious part of painting is surface preparation. Loose, peeling paint must be scraped, preferably by someone else, with a sharpened scraper, and, if necessary, sanded. Most areas need to be washed and rinsed. The majority of paint problems are simply the result of an unclean surface. Best thing to use for cleanup is a pressure washer. If you don't have access to a pressure washer, a stiff brush and a gallon of warm water mixed with ¼ - ½ cup of trisodium phosphate (TSP) will work very well. TSP is available at any paint store. If mildew or mold is a problem, add about a pint to quart of bleach to the TSP solution.

The best brushes for oil-based paints are natural or "China" bristle brushes. These

brushes are somewhat porous and have split ends so they hold a great deal of paint and lay it down very smoothly. This porousness, however, is a problem for latex paints. A natural bristle brush can pull the water right out of latex paint. Better to use a synthetic brush such as nylon or polyester when painting with latex.

Painters' putty, wood filler, shrink-free spackling compound, and caulk can all be used to fill holes and split areas in exterior wood. One painter I was talking to said he used Bondo® for splits and larger areas that need to be filled. Yes, the same stuff you used on your bitchin' 1977 Chevy Vega can now be a part of your house! However, the old apartment/dorm room standby, toothpaste, should not be used; that's for interior use only.

For cleaning up oil-based paint on your brushes and other equipment you'll have to



use a petroleum distillate-based paint thinner or brush cleaner, such as mineral spirits. To get the paint off your body, a mixture of cooking oil and dishwashing detergent will work just fine, and won't irritate your skin; men use gasoline and steel wool; real men of course, use a power belt sander. Pro tip: when using oil-based paint and you're finished for the day but still have more to do and you don't want to wash the brushes today only to cover them with paint tomorrow, just stick the wet brushes in a bucket of water. Next day wipe off the water and start painting. The paint can't dry in the water, and the water and oil won't mix. With latex paint, no problem - soap and water for everything.

Oh, look at that – the sun is going down. The temperature will probably drop 30 degrees in few minutes, maybe 40 degrees, you never know. That would be far too cold to paint. I can't possibly start on that shed now, wouldiflcouldhandsaretiedGodswill. Oh darn. Let's see if there any good college games on the TV, shall we? [TM](#)

® Friends

Sally Shih (LO 106) and April Hesik (LO 113) met for a luncheon at the Chop Bar in Oakland under the ® Friends connection program. Sally shares that it was great catching up with April. We discussed common computer issues and I shared my experience on Attorney Spring Training Day on May 29, 2014.

