



# How to Paint a House Right!™



## Exterior Painting 10-Step Series

### Step 1: Pressure-Washing the House

**Time required:** 6 to 8 hours for an average size house and deck

#### **Equipment list**

- 1 Gas-powered pressure washer (minimum 2200 PSI)
- 1 hand-pump garden sprayer (minimum 2-gallon capacity min.)
- 1 high quality 50-foot garden hose (preferably 2)
- 2 five-gallon buckets
- 1 gallon house detergent (recommend JO-MAX)
- 3 quarts bleach
- Rubber gloves
- Eye protection, rain gear, rubber or waterproof boots
- Rags
- Ladders (house-dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)

#### **Instructions**

First, you'll need to get your hands on a pressure washer because a regular garden hose is too weak to do the job right. Consider spending \$250 to get a 2200+ PSI gas-powered pressure washer, the kind with wheels and a long handle and a holster to hold the spray gun. A pressure washer is a handy thing to have around the house for a variety of reasons. Don't buy one of those chintzy electric pressure washers no matter how much PSI it claims to have. On the other hand, you could spend \$400-plus on a more powerful pressure washer if you expect to use it a lot in the future, although the \$250 ones work just fine in my opinion.

The best thing about washing a house is that it doesn't require much elbow grease because the wonderful world of chemistry lends a hand. There are a variety of house detergents on the market; I like JO-MAX (by Zinsser) because I've found it to be especially potent when attacking mold, mildew, and grime. Mix 4 gallons of water, 3 quarts of bleach, and 1 quart of JO-MAX in a 5-gallon bucket (you might want to split it between two buckets). Pour some of the mixture into a pump-up garden sprayer and pressurize it. Then pick out a section of the house and soak the area thoroughly, splashing every nook and cranny with the chemical solution, starting near the ground and working your way up so the solution keeps running back down on itself. Pressurize the pump as needed to keep a good stream flowing.

Don't skimp with the chemicals because if the mold and grime aren't killed and broken down, the pressure washer itself won't do much good. And avoid tackling too big of a section at once, because you don't want the chemical solution to dry before you have a chance to wash it off.

If you're concerned the chemicals will harm your flowers and foliage—a real possibility—soak them with a garden hose immediately before washing a nearby section, then rinse them clean immediately afterward. This might require unhooking and re-hooking the hose from the pressure washer, which is a hassle, but it does save the plants. If the foliage consists of burly bushes as opposed to frail flowers, you can stand 20 feet back and do the pre-soak and post-rinse with the pressure washer. It's not ideally suited to that task, however.

After spraying the solution onto a section, allow the chemicals a few minutes to kill the mold and mildew spores and eat away the grime on the siding, then start pressure washing the streaky mess off, again making sure to hit every inch of the painted surface. This time, though, start at the top and work your way down, rinsing thoroughly as you go. As far as water force goes, remember that the chemicals are doing the real work, so don't hold the nozzle of the pressure washer too close to the house or it could do damage, especially to wood siding. Keep the fan-width of your spray about eight- to twelve-inches wide on the siding and you are probably applying the proper amount of water pressure. If the house is peeling badly, expect a lot of chips to come flying off.

Sometimes water leaks into the house through the window frames, so it helps to have somebody positioned inside ready to wipe it up. Wear rain gear for the power washing festivities, but don't expect to stay dry; the suit is mostly to block the chemicals. Wear safety goggles if you can't stand the burning bleach in your eyes (and to protect from flying paint chips), but bring a clean rag along to keep wiping the lenses clear so you can see what you're doing. Rubber boots are also nice, but whatever boots you wear, be careful climbing up and down wet ladders with wet boots. It's easy to slip, so pay attention.

Washing the house isn't a lot of fun, but it's a critical first step so it must be done well. Afterward give the house (and yourself) two or three days to dry out. And please don't joke that the house looks so good now it doesn't even need to be painted. That one has been beat to death.

## **Step 2: Scraping Loose Paint**

**Time required:** 4 to 8 hours for an average-size house

### **Equipment list**

- Curved or square-blade scraper with a 2- or 3-inch blade and stout handle
- Smaller (1 inch) version of the above for tight corners and detail work
- Flexible (not stiff) 1-inch putty knife
- “5-Way” painters’ tool with hammerhead handle (for pounding in loose nails)
- Ladders (house-dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)
- Elbow grease

### **Instructions**

Scraping, hard as it is, is actually one of my favorite parts of the house painting process. It has a spiritual monotony and physical grind I find appealing. Most houses don’t require much scraping, of course, and some none at all. Ideally, paint should never be allowed to deteriorate to the point of actually peeling, because at that point the fundamental structure of the house is nakedly exposed to the elements and damage can occur very quickly. But sometimes for one reason or another people let their house go; sometimes it gets totally out of control, with entire sides peeling top to bottom. While it’s a chore to scrape a house like that, if you get in the Zone and keep moving along, you can get it done.

Granted, you need to know a few tricks to achieve scraping nirvana. First, realize your most important tool is a radio. You can use a boom box if you want, but I recommend a Sony Walkman radio with headphones that sells for about \$15 at Kmart. It is compact and feather-light and you won’t have to worry about destroying your precious iPod or smartphone (a distinct possibility). The muse of the radio goes better with painting anyway, so get the Walkman. Dangle the cord behind your back so it doesn’t get in the way. And forget that belt-clip it comes with, just slide the radio into your back pocket. Now you’re ready to scrape.

Beyond the radio, you need only a few basic tools. One should be a stout, preferably wood-handled scraper (wood handles are hard to find these days) with a sharp, curved blade (also hard to find—most scrapers these days are square-bladed). The blade should be 2 1/2 to 3 inches wide and two-sided so it can be reversed when the blade on one side gets dull. When both sides get dull, replace the blade or sharpen it with a file. Never waste your time scraping with a dull blade.

In addition to this large scraper, you should have a smaller scraper of the same design with a 1-inch blade. This will help get into tight corners. It also helps to carry a flexible (not stiff) putty knife with a one-inch-wide blade; this can be used to slide under and lift up the edge of peeling paint when the bigger scrapers can’t seem to grab it. Finally, a stout “5-way” painters’ tool is always a good thing to carry along; I like the kind with the hammer-head bottom on the handle so I can pound in any emerging nails before I scrape a section. You don’t want your scraper running over nails.

As far as the actual scraping itself goes, the goal is to remove any paint that is no longer bonding to the surface. If it’s still adhering, it can stay; in fact will be impossible to remove unless you dig the scraper into the wood to the point of damaging the siding. When you scrape, make your strokes consistent with the natural “direction” of the siding. In the case of wood, this usually means going with the grain. Do most of your scraping with the grain while applying a fair amount of pressure, sometimes even using two hands

on the handle; then do a very light scrape against the grain to get the edges that didn't get caught when you went with the grain. Finally, use the putty knife to "clean up" any recalcitrant edges that persist. Once there are no more edges of peeling paint sticking up, move on to the next section.

The main issue some people have with scraping is that it results in a "cratered" effect on the surface wherever the peeling paint stopped peeling and started adhering. This is especially noticeable on smooth, lapboard-wood siding. If you use a low-luster paint, it's hard to see these depressions from the sidewalk, but if you get up close you can see them and it bothers some people. If you are one of those people it bothers, you have two choices: Hire a contractor to completely remove all the old paint, or use a "siding spackle" to fill the craters and then sand them smooth.

The first option—complete paint removal—isn't really something you can do yourself. The various methods—chemical stripping, sandblasting, belt-sanding, or combinations thereof—are nasty, brutish, and never short. If you want to go that route, hire a contractor who specializes in restorations.

Using siding spackle, on the other hand, is something you can do yourself if those craters are really going to keep you awake at night. Ask at the paint store for an exterior-grade filler that dries hard and is meant to withstand the elements. Purchase a variety of putty knives to apply the filler to the siding (2-inch, 4-inch, and 6-inch should cover it). Fill in the craters with smooth swipes of the knife, trying not to goop on too much spackle because that's just more you'll have to sand off—but at the same time realize the spackle will usually shrink a little when it dries so you need to account for that.

After it's dry (give it at least 24 hours since most good exterior-grade spackle is oil-based), start sanding it with an orbital or vibrating palm-sander and sixty- or eighty-grit sandpaper. Wear a dust mask. The radio won't help you here because you won't be able to hear it over the sander, so get ready for some serious tedium. I've seen people practically reconstruct a whole side of a house using this method, and it looks okay if it's done properly, but it is time-consuming and labor-intensive. As such, if you choose this method of cosmetic repair (and keep in mind that's all it is), my advice is to focus on highly visible areas, i.e. the front side of the house and around commonly used doorways. If you find yourself spackling the back side of the garage, please consult a licensed therapist to help you deal with your neuroses.

### **Step 3: Caulking the House**

**Time required:** 4 to 8 hours for an average size house

#### **Equipment list**

- Dripless caulk gun
- Plastic bucket with four inches of water
- Rags
- New plastic razor knife (for cutting tips off caulk tubes)
- Flexible (not stiff) 1-inch putty knife
- 5-Way painters' tool with hammerhead handle
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)

## **Materials list**

- 35-year silicone latex caulk, white or colored (6-12 tubes for an average house in average condition)

## **Instructions**

So far you've washed and scraped the house. Now the house is anxiously waiting to see what you're going to do next. He thought the wash job was a little harsh, and the scraping kind of hurt, and he's thinking maybe it's time for a little TLC, huh, Mr. Homeowner? The house might even be thinking, hey, you know what? I've noticed the past few years that my joints ache when the cold, wet air blows through them. As long as you're paying so much attention to me all of a sudden, maybe you could provide a little relief for my pain. How about it?

Well, Mr. House, that's exactly what we're going to do: Apply some medicinal caulk to your wounds. And despite the high cost of health care these days, we won't skimp to save money—we'll buy a whole case of caulk, twelve tubes of the paintable 35-year silicone kind, and then generously and meticulously pump the salve into your cracks wherever they appear, be it around window or door frames, next to corner-boards or chimneys, or into any joints in the siding where the original caulk shrunk. We will rub the medication into any split or damaged fascia board, any minor cracks in the concrete foundation (if it's going to be painted), and anywhere else it's needed EXCEPT the natural gaps underneath each piece of lapboard siding, because we know you have to breathe, Mr. House, and we want that moist breath to be vented in a manner that prevents it from coming straight out through the paint job. Caulking the underside of lapboard siding is a huge no-no.

We will use our fingers to make the caulking look smooth so that when the paint is put on, nobody will even know the filler is underneath, it will appear as one with the structure. We will spend an entire day rubbing caulk into your gashes until our fingertips are wildly tender and our hands ache with fatigue from rinsing them in a bucket of cold water and wiping them on a wet rag over and over again.

We will administer this loving treatment, Mr. House, for two reasons: One because we appreciate how you keep the storms and cold air outside and we want to help you in that regard; and two because by sealing you up tight and making your cracks disappear underneath a fresh coat of paint, we will add thousands of dollars to the value of our houses by creating a powerful, new sensation of solidity. Thousands of dollars in exchange for one case of caulk. Does that sound like a good deal to you, Mr. House? We thought so. Please, then, just sit back and relax while we tend gently to your wounds.

## **Step 4: Priming Bare Wood**

**Time required:** 4 to 8 hours for an average size house

## **Equipment list**

- One 1-gallon cutting pot with ladder hook
- One 3-inch or 4-inch oil brush

- One 6-inch weenie roller (or full size roller if there are large areas to prime)
- One 5-gallon bucket with roller ramp (mesh grid that hooks inside the bucket)
- Tape, plastic, and masking paper as needed
- Rags
- Flexible (not stiff) 1-inch putty knife
- 5-Way painters' tool with hammerhead handle
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)

### Materials list

- Oil-based exterior primer for bare wood; oil or water-based exterior primer for spackled areas.
- Paint thinner
- Peel Stop (by Zinnser) if extensive cracking is present

### Instructions

When the washing, scraping, and caulking are done, the time has come to finally dip a brush into something fluid and spread it on the house. It's prime time.

On the surface, priming does not appear to be a convoluted matter, and perhaps I'm guilty of assigning it more complexity than it deserves. Bottom line is you slap primer on any bare wood (or bare spackle and sometimes bare metal) anywhere on the house. You do this so the surface is sealed and it won't suck the life out of the topcoat, causing said topcoat to crack and peel. End of story, right? Any baboon could prime a house.

I suppose. But that's not going to stop me from presenting a primer about primer, and in the process relate one of the most valuable lessons there is to learn about painting: always perform the [Fingernail Scratch Test](#) before painting a house. The Fingernail Scratch Test is simple: you paint a small section of siding, let it dry for a day, then come back and scratch it with your fingernail to make sure the new paint is adhering properly to the old paint. You'll know if it isn't—it will peel off the subsurface like a boiled plum, clearly not sticking. Although this is rare, it actually happened to me on a house that had an old coat of oil-based solid stain on it; even the pressure washing hadn't removed the residue. The entire house required a "bridge coat" of oil primer to fix the problem. If you perform the scratch test and don't think your paint is sticking, consult with the manager of your local paint store to figure out what's going on. You might need to do some extra priming.

There are only a few other salient points to make about priming. First, there is cause to wonder what exactly primer is in the first place. How does it differ from paint? More to the point, if you have a can of old paint sitting around, can you use it as primer to save money? In answer to that question, I will say that several bosses have instructed me to use leftover latex paint for priming interior drywall in new construction. As long as the leftover latex is flat or maybe satin sheen, I think it's okay to use it for that purpose. On the outside of a house, though, I would stick to bona fide primer, because it's not formulated exactly the same as paint, it's tweaked a little so that it soaks in and seals more, not aiming for the same rubber-like skin effect.

The best exterior primers are oil-based, and they can be gummy to work with; stir in a small shot of paint thinner or some Penetrol to alleviate this. (The paint companies

do make some water-based primers for exterior use; I would say that's better than nothing but not as good as oil.) Use a brush and possibly a roller, depending on how much surface you have to prime (a slim six-inch "weenie" roller works well for priming). Be aware that some painters switch steps 3 and 4 around and prime bare wood before caulking the house to seal the surface before applying caulk; others prefer to prime after caulking so they can prime the caulk itself. Whatever. Just keep in mind that oil primer is prone to flicking drops around, so you'll want to drag a tarp along with you and a thinner-dampened rag to quickly clean any mistakes. You might also want to "mask off" some windows and doors if you'll be priming above or around them; see the video on [masking the house and arranging drop cloths](#) for tips on doing that. If you accidentally drip some primer onto a porous surface such as asphalt shingles or concrete, wipe off as much as you can and then sprinkle some dirt on the spot, grinding it in with your heel to obscure the evidence. Works every time. Don't ever pour paint thinner on asphalt shingles.

One final note: If you have areas on the house where the paint is severely cracking but not actually peeling, consider applying a coat of Peel Stop, a clear primer that is designed to form a flexible barrier over cracking paint and prevent it from cracking anew through the fresh topcoat. Don't have unrealistic expectations for zero cracking in the future, but this could help minimize it. (Watch the priming video for more information on Peel Stop.)

### **Step 5: Removing the Downspouts and Other Miscellaneous Items**

**Time required:** 4 hours for an average size house

#### **Equipment list**

- Screw drivers (regular and Philips)
- Power drill with screwdriver bits (if preferred over handheld screwdriver)
- Other hardware as needed for removing random items
- Duster brush
- 5-Way painters' tool with hammerhead handle
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)

#### **Materials list**

- White masking tape
- Black Sharpie marker

#### **Instructions**

Removing the downspouts is simple: Unscrew all the rivets holding them onto the house, starting with the bottom clamps and ending where the downspout attaches to the gutter. See the video for some tips on recalcitrant downspouts that run right through a hole cut in the deck.

If the downspouts are factory-finished and not to be painted, put them somewhere you won't step on them, far away from the side of the house. Tape the screws for each downspout inside the end or you'll never find the little suckers when you are ready to put the downspouts back up after painting. And label each piece of tape with a black marker

to identify what corner of the house the downspout came from (NW, SE, etc.). It might be a few weeks before you put them back up, and it's easy to forget where they go.

If the downspouts need to be painted, do them separately in the garage on a rainy day. See my video on [painting the trim](#) for details on that.

This is also a good time to remove other miscellaneous items in preparation for painting, including bird feeders, thermometers, outdoor light fixtures, hanging plants, and what have you. Clear the space around the house by moving everything out of the way: the grill, the wood pile, flower pots, sprinklers, and anything else you might trip on while you're focusing your attention on painting the house. It saves a lot of angst during the painting process if you're not worried about stepping around stuff all the time.

## **Step 6: Masking the House and Arranging Drop Cloths**

**Time required:** 4-8 hours for an average size house, but it depends on whether you are spray painting or brushing and rolling.

### **Equipment list**

- Masking tool that dispenses tape/paper combination
- Drop cloths (you want as many as you can get; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for drop cloth guidelines)
- Brand new super-sharp neon-plastic razor knife
- Duster brush (for cleaning surfaces prior to taping)
- Rag (ditto)
- 5-Way painters' tool with hammerhead handle
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)

### **Materials list\***

- Good quality white masking tape (4 rolls of 1-inch tape to use on the masking tool, 2 rolls of 1 1/2-inch, and 1 roll of 2-inch)
- Blue "painters tape" (1 roll of 1-inch, 2 rolls of 1 1/2-inch)
- Masking paper (one or two rolls of 9-inch paper and one roll of 12-inch)
- 1 roll of duct tape
- 1 roll (box) of .31 mil, 9-foot "painters plastic"

\*Tape, paper, and plastic quantities are house-dependent and will vary.

### **Instructions**

When you "drop and mask" an area, you use a combination of tape, plastic, paper, and drop cloths to cover and protect every surface on which you don't want to get paint. There are dozens of handy tricks and techniques to dropping and masking, but the main thing is to be thorough because it will pay off in the end with a more professional looking paint job and far less time spent cleaning dried paint off places you don't want it (a contemptible task).

I recommend spending \$35 on a professional-grade "masker" at the paint store. A masker is a tool that dispenses paper and tape simultaneously, and it is one of the most



essential pieces of equipment in a painter's tool bucket. Have the employee at the store show you how to use it, and remember you need to buy paper and tape. I recommend using nine- or twelve-inch paper and one-inch tape for most exterior masking. You should also purchase several rolls of 1½-inch and 2-inch tape for all the miscellaneous taping you'll need to do, and also a roll of duct tape for sealing off concrete, brick, roof shingles, and other hard-to-stick-to surfaces. Good medium-grade white masking tape will do for most exterior purposes, but you'll want to buy some of the expensive blue stuff if either of these situations exist: 1) You plan on leaving the tape on vinyl window and door frames for more than a few days (especially if it's baking in the sun), or 2) You are taping the glass on your wood windows before painting them. Definitely use blue tape whenever you're taping to glass.

Masking is kind of like wrapping presents: You just make sure everything is covered and taped shut. Use the masker to protect any small items adjoined to the siding: cable boxes, meters, light fixtures, etc. As you mask, keep a roll of 1-inch tape around your wrist like a bracelet because you'll frequently need to peel off strips to seal up the gaps between pieces of paper. (I like to keep 6 or 7 short tabs stuck to my shirt for easy grabbing.)

When masking off windows and doors, your thoroughness will be influenced by whether you are spraying or brushing and rolling. If you're spraying you need to completely seal them off, so use the 1½-inch tape and a roll of lightweight .31 mil thick, 9-foot-tall "painters plastic" to tightly cover all the windows and doors (see [video](#)). If you are using the roller-and-brush method, you can probably get away with draping a piece of 12-inch paper across the top of each window and door frame like an awning to protect it from splatters raining down from above—but this will also cost you time later because you'll have to carefully "cut in" around the window and door frames.

You also want to mask and drop any surfaces that abut the siding or are directly below where you'll be painting, such as decks, concrete, rooflines, etc. After you mask for a while you will develop your own system of present-wrapping to make this all happen. Purchase a brand new neon-plastic razor-knife (not a utility knife) at the paint store to slice pieces of plastic; the knife will cost you a couple bucks and it's money well spent.

As for drop cloths, I suggest you buy at least four large, professional-grade canvas drop cloths. Paint won't leak through these, so use them on critical surfaces directly below wherever you are painting, like driveways, sidewalks, and decks. Supplement these bombproof "drops" with whatever random old sheets and blankets you can gather (paint will bleed through these, so only spread them on less-critical periphery items like bushes, drain pipes, etc.). You can also use those ubiquitous big blue plastic tarps from the hardware store to cover certain areas if you are spraying, but remember to *never* set an extension ladder on a plastic drop cloth because the feet might slip and you'll go for a ride, maybe even crash through a window and land in the living room. That's going to slow down the job.

Try to have enough drop cloths on hand to completely "drop off" at least one side of the house (and a little bit around each corner if you're spraying). You'll have to move the whole drop-cloth network along with you as you paint your way around the house. While this masking and dropping process takes time, it actually saves time in the end

because it prevents you from having to think about anything except painting when you are painting, allowing you to really let the material fly.

## **Step 7: Painting the House with a Brush and Roller**

**Time required:** 10 to 25 hours for an average size house; does not include [painting the trim](#) or [staining the deck](#).

### **Equipment list**

- Four 5-gallon buckets
- Four 1-gallon cutting pots with handles
- Brushes (highest quality you can buy)
- One 3 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (having two is helpful, especially if you're painting multiple colors)
- One 2 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (for windows and other small trim)
- Two roller handles (highest quality you can get)
- One 2-to-4 foot extendable roller pole (metal, stout, high quality)
- Optional: one 4-8 foot extendable roller pole
- Roller covers or "naps" (highest quality—I prefer the yellow ones over the white ones). Thicknesses will range from 3/8 inch to 1 1/4 inches, depending on how rough the surfaces are. It's best to err on the side of thicker rather than thinner naps.
- Two or three grated roller "ramps" that fit into 5-gallon buckets
- "Weenie" roller (handle and at least four high quality weenie roller "naps")
- Two bucket hooks (for attaching paint buckets to ladders)
- 5-way painters' tool with hammerhead handle
- Rags
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)
- Optional: Ladder jacks and scaffold plank (handy for doing large areas of siding, but hard for one person to put up and take down)

### **Materials list**

- High quality exterior latex paint. See my videos on [how to buy exterior latex paint](#) and [calculating how much paint you need](#). Online calculators and estimator worksheets are available on my [house painting calculators](#) page.

### **Instructions**

Know this: The most time-consuming aspect of actually painting the house is the transference of paint from the can to the house—in other words, the amount of time the paint spends making that trip. Obviously spraying helps greatly to reduce that time because it offers a direct, high speed line from the bucket to the surface, but a house can also be painted quickly and efficiently using a nice, thick roller to carry the paint to its ultimate destination and a brush to cut in the corners. So if for some reason you can't or

don't want to spray paint your house, take heart that you're not that far behind the sprayers time-wise.

Here's the roller/brush outfit I recommend for maximum speed and efficiency: A 5-gallon bucket with a metal roller ramp in it; a professional-grade roller handle with a 1/2-inch to 1 1/4-inch roller cover on it (the thickness of the roller cover "nap" will depend on the porosity of the siding and how much paint it will take); a sturdy professional-grade roller pole that will extend from two to four feet; and a one-gallon "cutting pot" with a top quality 3 1/2-inch angled-tip nylon brush to go with it. Loop a damp rag through a belt loop, and stick your 5-way tool in your pocket in case you come across a bit of peeling paint that you missed. And finally, you'll want to buy a couple of bucket hooks to secure your 5-gallon roller bucket and 1-gallon cutting pot to the rungs on your extension ladder or the top of your step ladder (there are usually holes cut in the top to hang things off). Bucket hooks are important because you want your arms to be focused on painting and holding onto the ladder, not clutching buckets.

Pop open three fresh cans of paint (or, better, a 5-gallon bucket of it) and enjoy the clean, creamy vision for a moment. Stir the paint if needed. Then fill a 5-gallon bucket half full. Fill the cutting pot a third full. Carry both buckets (two trips) to the top of the ladder and hook them on. (One way to simplify things is to NOT bring the 1-gallon cutting pot with you all the time, just bring the brush. Store the brush up high by sticking the handle inside one of the hollow ladder rungs. Then when you need a dip of paint just reach down into the 5-gallon bucket with the brush. This works fine for many situations, although if you need to do a lot of cutting, you're better off working out of a 1-gallon cutting pot.)

Okay, you've got your paint outfit together—now where do you go to actually paint? I usually pick a side of the house based on the sun and the season. If it's mid-summer, I want to avoid painting in the sun during the heat of the day, so I'll start out on the sunny side and move into the shade in the afternoon. But if it's late fall, I want to concentrate on shady sides in the morning because they will need all day to dry in the cool air. I'll then focus on sunny sides in the afternoon because the sun isn't that hot and the paint will need that sun to dry before nighttime temperatures dip.

After you pick a side to start on—and assuming you've done all your [masking the house and arranging drop cloths](#)—it's time to focus on the upper leftmost point of that side. If the house has eaves and fascia (and possibly painted gutters), you'll need to paint them first. Brush out the fascia (and possibly the gutter) first. (Note: If the fascia is going to be a different color than the eaves, skip it for now and do it when you paint the trim.) Then attack the underside of the eaves. Cut in the corners with the brush and roll the large, flat areas. Usually there are joints between the sections of the eaves; do one section at a time to reduce the chance of "flashing." You will soon discover that painting eaves with a brush and roller makes your neck ache. But take solace in the fact that once the eaves are done, standing up straight to paint the siding will seem like a treat. Paint all the eaves on one side before you tackle the siding.

When it's time for the siding, your technique will depend on whether your house has 1) natural wood siding (lapboard or shakes), and whether it has natural grain or is smooth; 2) engineered-wood or cement-composite siding like Hardiplank; or 3) masonry (stucco or brick). Regardless of the type of siding, the paint will need to be rolled and/or brushed onto all surfaces. But the best techniques differ somewhat for each surface. I'm

going to start with the basic technique for wood lapboard siding and then move on to explain the others.

To paint lapboard wood siding, once again focus on the upper-left section of the side you're painting. If the eaves are a different color than the siding, obviously you will need to set up a second roller/brush combination in the new color. You will need to cut a straight line against the eaves with the brush. This isn't usually too difficult. If you need to cut that line, I'd do that first, then roll out some siding, then finish cutting in the section.

Get your roller good and wet, then roll out an area of siding in front of you, maybe six feet wide by six feet high, depending on what you can reach. Roll in the same direction as the orientation of the siding—if it's horizontal, you want to roll horizontally, if it's vertical, you want to roll vertically.

Don't be afraid to keep dipping the roller and putting a good amount of paint on the house. In my experience, the #1 cause of bad paint jobs is people not using enough paint, trying to stretch every dip until the roller is dry. Keep the roller wet, dip again, dip again. Use 20 percent more paint than you think you should—as long as you are not leaving drips and runs, it will not hurt the house. Lay the paint on liberally, then, as your last step, go over it all smoothly to even it out (lay it off). See the [video](#) for more tips on how to roll.

When you're done that first 6 x 6 foot section, stick the roller back in the 5-gallon bucket (which is hooked to one of the rungs), grab your brush, and start "cutting-in" the area you just rolled. You'll need to brush out all the corners and crannies where the roller couldn't get. Work the paint in good, and then smooth it out with firm but caring strokes. Make sure you get a good coat of paint on the bottom edge of each siding board, a chronically overlooked spot that cries out to be protected from the water that pools on it.

Some people like to do all the cutting-in before the rolling. Sometimes I do it that way too, mostly when precision cutting is needed. But in general, when painting wood siding, you can save some time by rolling a section first and then cutting-in the corners and edges immediately after.

Caveat: The amount of brushing you need to do beyond cutting-in will vary depending on the surface of the wood siding. If it's rough enough to hide the roller stipple, you're done. However, if it's smooth wood, you might want to put a brush stroke in all of it, because otherwise the roller stipple might show in clear contrast to the brushing you did when cutting in; look down the board sideways and you will see the difference, especially with darker colors. Going for the brush-stroke look on siding takes a lot of extra effort, and a lot of people won't notice the difference. (If you are going to brush out all the siding, see the video on [how to make your brush strokes magically disappear](#).)

Now, here's the crux of the whole thing: After painting your first 6-foot-by-6-foot (or whatever size) section, do *not* lower your ladder and start painting the section below. Rather, keep the ladder at the same height and move it horizontally to the right a few feet (assuming you are painting horizontal lapboard siding). Then climb up and paint the section to the right of the first one, making sure to lay off all final brush and roller strokes back into the "wet edge" of the first section you painted. Keep going all the way to the corner of the house like this; *then* lower your ladder a few rungs and do the same thing going back the other direction. Following the natural track of the siding like this and

keeping a wet edge ensures you'll get an even coat that won't "flash." A lot of homeowners and even housepainters neglect this simple concept, instead doing a six-foot-wide section from top to bottom, then moving the ladder over a few feet and doing that whole section top to bottom. In the meantime the first section has had time to start the drying process, so all overlapping areas essentially get a double coat, while the non-overlapping areas don't. This creates an irregular aesthetic that is very obvious when viewed at an angle, especially if you're cursed with the inclination to scrutinize paint jobs.

### **Brushing and rolling cement-composite siding**

There are a few additional things to keep in mind when brushing and rolling cement-composite siding (and this same advice applies to wood-composite siding—also known as "engineered wood"—which, like the cement-composite, lacks any natural, porous grain). Materials like Hardiplank siding have changed the game a bit as far as painting goes. For the most part it has improved things because it is so quick and easy to spray (see the video on [spray painting the house](#)). But if you don't want to spray—and I don't blame you a bit—you can still paint composite siding relatively quickly. Just get your hands on a weenie.

A weenie roller, that is. This amazing little contraption is shaped pretty much like it sounds, six inches long and with a nap ranging from very short (fine-finish) to thick and shaggy (which is what you want for rolling composite siding—and you'll want to buy a "contractor's pack" of these things at the paint store because they wear out fast when employed to cover serious ground). A weenie roller is much lighter and more compact than a regular 9-inch roller, and using it in conjunction with a brush allows you to quickly dispatch large areas of composite siding. You can use a regular 9-inch roller if you want—I'd suggest a 1/2 or 3/4 inch nap—but because we're not trying to aggressively "work" the paint into a porous grain, we have the luxury of using a lighter-weight setup on cement-composite siding. Keep your weenie roller wet with frequent dips in a 5-gallon bucket/roller ramp setup, and always check the areas you roll to make sure you're not leaving behind any light spots where the faux grain dips. When you're cutting in, make sure to get the undersides of the siding boards really well—keep dipping that brush. When brushing and rolling composite siding, I usually cut in a section first, then roll it out. Just seems to work better for me.

### **Painting wood shakes siding**

I'm talking about the shakes with the deep, uniform grooves running up and down. These can be rolled with a thick roller, but I've found that sometimes the paint actually "bridges" the gap between the grooves and dries that way, not adhering to the deep, inner part of the groove like you want. One way to deal with this is to roll the paint on the shakes with a thick-nap roller, then go over the shakes with a 9-inch paint pad on a pole. I don't have much use for paint pads in general, but this is one instance where they actually help. By running the pad down the siding with a bit of force, you can work that paint into those narrow, deep grooves, and it looks very nice. You'll need to buy a few replacement pads because this tears them up pretty quickly.

### **Painting stucco and brick houses**

Stucco and brick houses are the most forgiving type to paint. It hardly even matters what direction you run your roller or whether you feather out your brush strokes. Just make sure you use a thick-nap roller (probably 1 1/4 inch) and put on a good amount of paint because stucco will really soak it up. As long as you don't leave any obvious thick lines when rolling, it should come out looking fine.

Note: My experience has been that stucco is conducive to producing "chalking" in the previous coat of paint, so make sure you've addressed this issue if it exists. To test, wipe your finger against the stucco and look for a heavy, chalky residue on the finger (you'll almost always at least see a light residue). Usually the pressure-washing has taken care of heavy chalking, but sometimes chalking is persistent and might even require priming. If you notice a lot of chalking, talk to the manager at your paint store and discuss solutions. The manager might even be able to come out and take a look at the problem—don't hesitate to ask, especially if you're spending a thousand dollars on paint.

### **Step 7: Spray Painting the House**

**Time required:** 5 to 10 hours to spray the siding on an average size house; time does not include [masking the house and arranging the drop cloths](#), which must be done first and must be done well.

#### **Equipment list**

- Professional grade airless paint sprayer (rent, borrow, or buy).
- At least 50 feet of spray line, one spray gun, one or more spray tips (ask at the paint store about the best size tip for your job; typically for spraying latex paint on an exterior I will use a 515 or 517 size tip)
- Throat lubricant for sprayer
- 12 gauge extension cord

Note: In addition to the sprayer, it's likely you will want to have on hand some or all of the same equipment required when [painting the house with a brush and roller](#), listed again below with a few modifications. However, the need for rollers (and "backrolling") will depend on the type of siding you are painting—see instructions):

- Four to six 5-gallon buckets (all reasonably clean, and two should be very clean—these will be used to spray out of)
- Two to four 1-gallon cutting pots with handles
- Brushes (highest quality you can buy)
- One 3 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (having two is helpful, especially if you're painting multiple colors)
- One 2 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (for windows and other small trim)
- Two roller handles (highest quality you can get)
- One 2-to-4 foot extendable roller pole (metal, stout, high quality)
- Optional: one 4-8 foot extendable roller pole
- Roller covers or "naps" (highest quality—I prefer the yellow ones over the white ones). Thicknesses will range from 3/8 inch to 1 1/4 inches, depending on how



rough the surfaces are. It's best to err on the side of thicker rather than thinner naps.

- Two or three grated roller “ramps” that fit into 5-gallon buckets
- “Weenie” roller (handle and at least four high quality weenie roller “naps”)
- Two bucket hooks (for attaching paint buckets to ladders)
- 5-way painters’ tool with hammerhead handle
- Rags
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)
- Optional: Ladder jacks and scaffold plank (handy for doing large areas of siding, but hard for one person to put up and take down)

### Materials list

- High quality exterior latex paint. See my videos on [how to buy exterior latex paint](#) and [calculating how much paint you need](#). Online calculators and estimator worksheets are available on my [house painting calculators](#) page.
- Two 5-gallon paint screens to filter the paint through
- Throat seal for the sprayer
- Easy access to lots of clean water

### Instructions

Know this: The most time-consuming aspect of actually painting the house is the transference of paint from the can to the house—in other words, the amount of time the paint spends making that trip. Obviously spraying helps greatly to reduce that time because it offers a direct, high speed line from the bucket to the siding. However, spraying requires you to spend more time [masking the house and arranging drop cloths](#). The amount of time that takes greatly depends on the house. Sometimes spraying is a lot faster than brushing and rolling; sometimes it takes the same amount of time but is still worth it because it's a little easier on your body; and sometimes spraying just isn't worth it due to an excess of “stuff” on and near the house, including foliage and nearby neighbors, that would need to be protected from overspray.

All that said, spraying a house is entirely possible for your average person. You just need to follow the steps and procedures I demonstrate in my videos, including [how to set up a paint sprayer](#) and [how to clean up a paint sprayer](#).

First, forget about those cheap plastic paint sprayers you see advertised in commercials or sold at K-Mart. They are rubbish. The only possible use a person might have for one of those is to spray a popcorn ceiling inside. They actually work pretty well for that. But for anything else, forget it. They have no power and no capacity to hold paint. You pour one gallon at a time into the pot—do you know how fast you fly through a gallon of paint when you're using a professional-grade airless paint sprayer? You'll spend half your time refilling that stupid pot.

So you either need to borrow or rent a real airless paint sprayer, the whole outfit including the spray gun. You'll need a beefy 12-gauge extension cord. You'll also need a tip for the gun. I use a “515” or “517” tip for spraying regular latex paint, but this gets too jargony. Ask at the paint store what size tip you should use.

Before you actually spray, you need to “mask off” the house with painters’ plastic and paper as described in [Step 6](#). Because you are spraying you need to seal everything

up really tight—much more so than if you were brushing and rolling. Don't underestimate the power of the sprayer to blast through a shaky masking job and dust a fancy front door or expensive outdoor light fixture with overspray.

Once the house is masked good and tight and the drop cloths are arranged, it's time to start praying. I mean spraying.

It will go just fine if you adhere to the First Commandment of Spraying: Never stop moving the gun when the trigger is pulled and paint is blasting out. Keep that gun ever in motion like a shark in the ocean, because the instant you stop, a pile of glop will appear on the side of the house and bam, you're screwed. It happens that fast. It's not a big issue if you are "backrolling" all the paint into natural wood or stucco, but if you're spraying smooth lapboard siding, or cement-composite siding like Hardiplank, and the goal is to just spray it on and let it dry without backrolling, then having to feather out heavy spots with a brush or roller can cause the paint to "flash." Dark colors are especially prone to this. (It is possible to touch up such flashing in a manner that it won't show—see the [put up, touch up, and clean up](#) video for tips.)

Here's how to make sure you never stray from the First Commandment. First, start your arm in motion *before* pulling the trigger. Call this your lead-in. Second, continue moving your arm *after* you release the trigger, if only for an instant—this is your follow-through. If you lead-in and follow-through every time, you'll be way ahead of the pack as a sprayer.

Beyond that universal rule, basic spraying requires only a few simple techniques. First, use broad, sweeping strokes with your arms, either side-to-side or up-and-down, depending on the orientation of the siding—go the same direction as it does. When you reach the end of a stroke, don't just start back the other way—that micro-second of being on the same spot, the turnaround point, will cause a build-up of paint, and even if it doesn't outright run down the siding, it will be visible later as a flash. So instead, flick your wrist away from the surface while you switch directions, directing the spray off into space for just an instant, then bringing it back down onto the siding like a plane coming in for a landing. Continue down the runway to the next turnaround spot, do the wrist-flick, and then come back. Be aware of where the wrist-flicked paint is drifting because you might speckle something, like your neighbor's house or car. Be especially vigilant if you live in a tight neighborhood.

After you've sprayed the area of siding in front of you, move the ladder horizontally and spray the next section. Overlap your spray strokes by about a third to avoid light spots and keep a wet edge all the way across the side of the house just as described in the video on [painting the house with a brush and roller](#). Spray on a good, heavy coat, because it could be said that the number one cause of poor paint jobs is not using enough paint.

While basic spraying is not overly difficult, there is a lot more to know about spraying, and nobody knows it all. I spent the first half of my fifteen-year painting career avoiding spraying as much as possible, and I did just fine. When I finally bought a sprayer I was afraid of it—the gun and hose writhed in my hands like a powerful snake ready to swing around and bite—but eventually we developed a team chemistry, and thereafter I became amazed at what we could accomplish.

## **Step 8: Painting the Trim**



**Time required:** 5 to 20 hours on an average size house. It will largely depend on whether there are wood windows to paint. If your house has vinyl windows, painting the trim should not take more than a good day.

### **Equipment list (to paint one trim color)**

- Two to four 1-gallon cutting pots with handles
- Small “ramp” to put in one cutting pot for rolling with 4-inch roller
- Brushes (highest quality you can buy)
- One 3 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (having two is helpful if you’re painting multiple colors)
- One 2 1/2-inch angled tip latex brush (for windows and other small trim)
- One 4-inch roller handle (highest quality you can get)
- One or two 4-inch roller covers or “naps” (highest quality—I prefer the yellow ones over the white ones). Thickness will range from 3/8 inch to 1 1/4 inches, depending on how rough the trim surfaces are. It’s best to err on the side of thicker rather than thinner naps.
- **Alternate:** You could use a “weenie” roller setup to roll cornerboards and fascia, but I think a regular 4-inch roller is better suited to rolling cornerboards and fascia, which are often rough wood.
- One 2-4 foot extendable roller pole (metal, stout, high quality)
- **Optional:** One 4-8 foot extendable roller pole; very handy for rolling high cornerboards
- Two bucket hooks (for attaching paint buckets to ladders)
- 5-way painters’ tool with hammerhead handle
- Rags
- Ladders (house dependent; see full [exterior equipment list](#) for ladder suggestions)
- Optional: Ladder jacks and scaffold plank (handy for doing large areas of siding, but hard for one person to put up and take down)

### **Materials list**

High quality exterior latex paint. See my video on [how to buy exterior latex paint](#). For an average size house with vinyl windows, one gallon of trim paint should be enough. Houses with wood windows or other large trim areas will require more.

### **Instructions**

Painting the trim means different things on different houses. If you have vinyl windows, painting the trim mostly entails brushing and rolling any cornerboards and fascia (and gutters and downspouts if they are not factory-finished); painting any exterior doors and door jams; and painting any wood windows.

Painting the trim generally moves along pretty quickly if you don’t have to paint windows. If you do have to paint windows and you need to replace window putty, see my video on [how to replace cracked and failing window putty](#). A couple of other videos you might want to watch are [how to tape off window glass](#) and [how to make your brush strokes magically disappear](#).

If you're not doing windows, use a combination of a 3 1/2-inch angled brush and a 4-inch roller (3/4 or 1 1/4 inch nap) to brush and roll your way around the house. A long roller pole helps for rolling high-up cornerboards, but you'll need to get up on a ladder anyway to cut in the cornerboards against the eaves, so if you don't have a long pole you can just roll when you're up there and then move the ladder down, roll some more, and move down again until you get to the ground.

Wood doors can be easily brushed and rolled, but a metal entry door is harder to make look good. Same thing applies to factory-finished garage doors that have faded and need painting. See the videos on [how to paint a metal door](#) and [how to paint a garage door](#) for tips on giving these doors a professional finish.

## Step 9: Staining the Deck

**Time required:** 5 to 8 hours for an average size deck, including railing. (Does not include [pressure-washing](#).)

### Equipment list

- One 4-inch brush made specifically for oil paint and stain; if you're using latex stain, you can use the same 3 1/2 inch all-purpose brush you've been using to paint the house
- One roller handle and nap (3/8 to 1 1/4 inch thickness, depending on the roughness of the deck and whether you are applying transparent, semi-transparent, or solid stain)
- 2- to 4-foot extending roller pole
- One 1-gallon cutting pot
- One 5-gallon bucket with a roller ramp
- Weenie roller setup if you're painting lots of railing
- Broom and small duster brush
- Rags

### Materials list

- High quality deck stain. What type of stain you use will depend on what's already on there and the condition of the deck. I generally go with a transparent or semi-transparent oil-based natural stain on new wood if it's nice cedar or redwood. On pine you might want to use a solid color deck stain. Solid color deck stain (either oil or latex) might also be a good option if the deck is 20+ years old and starting to wear, because the solid stain provides an extra layer of protection—it's almost like paint. The amount of stain you need will depend on what kind it is. Transparent or semi-transparent oil stains can cover 400+ square feet per gallon. Solid color stain might cover as little as 200 square feet, especially the latex variety. See my video on [how to estimate the amount of paint you need](#) and also the [house painting calculators](#) page for more information.
- Paint thinner will be needed if you're using oil stain.

## Instructions

A deck can rot right off a house if it's not maintained every two to five years with a good stain job—believe me, I've seen it happen. Staining a deck is usually not particularly difficult, either, so it's hard to understand why some people put it off. Listening to the radio and staining the deck is actually a pretty pleasant way to spend a day.

Let's assume your deck is clean and any mold or mildew has been removed (see the video on [pressure-washing](#)). If you're painting your house in your spare time, weeks might have passed since you pressure-washed the deck. That's okay. Provided nobody's been tramping mud on it, the deck is still clean. Just give it a good sweeping before you start.

Then get your brush and roller set up. If you're using oil stain, you'll want a nice 4-inch brush made specifically for oil paint and stain; if you're using latex stain, you can use the same 3 1/2 inch brush you've been using to paint the house. You'll also want a roller on a 2- to 4-foot extension pole. Have the brush in a one-gallon cutting pot and the roller in a five-gallon bucket with a roller ramp. The brush will be used to cut in the edges and corners; the roller will be used on the main deck floor.

As for the thickness of your roller nap, it will depend on the surface of the deck and what type of stain you are putting on. Transparent or semi-transparent stain require a less thick nap, maybe 3/8 or 3/4 inch. Solid stain, on the other hand, is almost like paint, and will likely require a 1 1/4 inch nap. Whatever size you use, have two or three on hand because decks tend to wear out roller naps in quick order.

The biggest problem most people face when they stain their own deck is “flashing” because they stop staining in the middle of a board and allow it to dry. This is easy to avoid if you paint 4 or 5 boards at a time from end to end, all the way across, and keep a “wet edge” the entire length. It also helps to “lay off” all final roller strokes **back into** the wet edge and gently lift the roller off like a plane taking flight. This gets rid of roller “start marks,” which are ugly. The video [staining the deck](#) shows how to do this. Again, always roll in the same direction as the boards. Do 4 or 5 all the way across, then do the next 4 or 5 going back the other direction.

If your deck has a lot of railing with spindles, a weenie roller setup can help. Use it in conjunction with the brush. Be wary of leaving “thick edges” around the corners on intricate railing and square spindles. Always take one last look at all sides of a spindle or rail to make sure you didn't leave a big drool running down an edge.

Some people simply spray “water seal” on a deck with a garden sprayer. I personally think any stain or sealer is going to be more effective if it's worked into the grain with a roller and brush. I've never really used one of those water seals, though, so I can't say for sure if I'm right.

## Step 10: Put Up, Touch Up and Clean Up

**Time required:** 4 to 8 hours for an average size house.

### Equipment list

- Screw driver, pliers, hammer
- Stiff brush (nylon or wire)
- Razor scraper for cleaning speckles off window glass

- Two one-gallon cutting pots
- Two brushes
- Optional: weenie roller setup in siding color
- Rags
- Ladders as needed

### **Materials list**

- A quarter gallon of each paint color used on the house
- Blue tape for touching up lines
- Some type of cleaning solvent like Goof Off or Contractor's **TK**
- Sprayway Glass Cleaner

### **Instructions**

You're almost done painting the house but not quite. First you need to put up all the stuff you took down: downspouts, hose holders, thermometers, bird feeders, hanging plants, and address numbers (go buy new ones because the old ones will look exactly that). This is a good time to reconsider the notion of putting back up trellises with vines that sit against the house. In my opinion it's never good to have foliage touching the house or even getting that close, because it results in more water being there and that can damage the paint job and also cause mold and mildew. But if you're in love with the trellis look, put 'em back up now. Put the outdoor furniture back where it belongs. If you removed all or part of your outdoor light fixtures, put them up now or consider replacing them with new ones that befit the beautiful new paint job. You can get decent new fixtures for not much money.

Second, you need to touch up any little spots you left behind while you were focusing on the entirety of the paint job. Pour a little bit of body color into a one-gallon cutting put with a brush, then make another setup in trim color. Walk around the house slowly with the two colors, peering into all the corners and examining all the lines closely (bring some blue tape to help straighten up lines between colors). Touch up underneath hose spigots, around light fixtures, the sides of downspouts that got nicked when being put back up, etc.

Be aware of "flashing." Sometimes touching up a spot in the middle of a siding board will be visible because the light reflects off it in a different way. The way to avoid flashing is to just repaint the entire board (between joints). A weenie roller can make quick work of this if you have a lot of siding to touch up.

And finally, it's time to clean up. Pick up the paint chips from the flower beds, remove any paper and plastic still adorning the house and pick up any scraps on the ground. If you got paint anywhere it shouldn't be—the vinyl windows, the concrete, the deck, the roof, the door glass, anywhere—clean it off now by whatever means necessary and pay penance for not doing so when it was still wet, when it would have been easy. A simple wet rag will often clean dried speckles off vinyl window frames if you apply a good amount of pressure and the paint hasn't been on there for months. A "razor scraper" will get dried speckles off the glass itself. If the bleach from the pressure-washing streaked your windows with a white residue that regular glass cleaner can't get rid of, try Sprayway foaming glass cleaner. It works.

If you dripped paint onto asphalt shingles it can't easily be cleaned (don't pour solvent on your roof), but it can be disguised effectively by tossing a handful of dirt on it and grinding it in with your shoe. If you dripped paint onto concrete or cement anywhere, you can use Goof-Off or other available products along with a stiff brush. Let the cleaner soak into the spot for a couple minutes before you brush. If you choose to use a wire brush, be aware it might scratch concrete or cement. A very stiff nylon brush is a better option. Last but not least, clean all your equipment completely and put it away neatly. Hang brushes from nails if you don't have the cardboard sheathes they came in. I don't recommend taking the time to clean roller covers, just toss 'em. Shake out and fold all your drop cloths. Make sure your paint sprayer has paint thinner in the lines if you're putting it in long term storage.

Okay, now you're done. Crack a beer, sit down on the lawn, and look at the house. You're done.