

Volume 6

SOLVING EXTERIOR PAINT PROBLEMS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

DO IT YOURSELF SERIES



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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDES

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SOLVING EXTERIOR PAINT PROBLEMS

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Peeling Solutions:

If exterior moisture is the cause, eliminate the source by taking such steps as repairing the roof, replacing caulking, and cleaning gutters and downspouts; also, cut vegetation away from the building. If moist air is originating inside the building, consider installing vents, especially in kitchen, bathroom and laundry areas; attic louvers, exhaust fans and dehumidifiers may also be helpful.

Remove all loose paint with a scraper or wire brush, sand rough surfaces and prime any bare wood that is visible. Repaint with our top quality acrylic latex paint. This will provide excellent adhesion and allow water vapor to escape without harming the coating.

Solving Exterior Paint Problems

Adhesion is one of the most important characteristics of exterior paint. In fact, many of the most common paint problems are due to adhesion failures.

To correct an adhesion problem, it is important to first understand why the failure occurred, then proper steps can be taken to prevent reoccurrence.

Keep one thing in mind, however: Top quality paints, especially those made with acrylic binders, have better adhesion properties than standard grades of paint. So, it is always wise to repaint with a top quality coating.

This guide provides more specific information on common paint problems and suggestions on how to correct them.

Peeling

The spontaneous loss of ribbons or sheets of paint due to loss of adhesion. When the surface is coated with a primer and topcoat, or with several coats of paint, the peeling may involve all the coats, some of them, or just the topcoat.

Possible Causes

Swelling of wood due to seepage or penetration of rain, humidity and other forms of moisture into the home through uncaulked joints, deteriorated caulk, a leaking roof or other areas.

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Chalking Solutions:

First, remove as much of the chalk residue as possible, using a stiff bristle brush (or wire brush on masonry) and garden hose; to speed the work, consider using power washing equipment. Allow the surface to dry, then check for any remaining chalk by running a hand over the surface. If some chalk is still present, apply a quality oil-based or acrylic latex primer (or comparable sealer for masonry), then repaint; if little or no chalk remains, simply repaint. Finally, if chalk rundown has discolored brick, masonry or another surface, try removing the stains by scrubbing the areas with a stiff brush and detergent solution and rinsing thoroughly. If this does not work, an acid wash may be necessary. Either way, if the affected area dries to a different color, consider painting it.

Possible Causes cont.

Excess humidity or other moisture escaping from within the home through the exterior walls (less likely with latex paints, which allow water vapor to escape without affecting the paint film).

Inadequate surface preparation.

Use of a lower quality paint that has inadequate adhesion and flexibility.

Applying latex paint under conditions that hinder good film formation, ie; on a very hot or very cold day, in windy weather.

Applying an oil-based paint over a damp or wet surface.

Excessive Chalking

The formation of an excessive amount of fine powder on the surface of a paint film during weathering which can cause color fading, rundown over another surface, and excessive film erosion. (Some degree of chalking is a normal, desirable way for a paint film to wear, helping to keep the surface clean by allowing rain to wash away dirt with the chalk.)

Possible Causes

Use of a lower quality, highly pigmented paint.

Use of an interior grade of paint for an outdoor application.

Use of a non alkaline resistant paint over an alkaline surface.

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Blistering Solutions:

First, determine whether or not the blisters go all the way down to the substrate.

If the blisters go down to the substrate, the problem may be due to moisture coming from behind the substrate. Take steps to remove the source of the moisture, if at all possible. If the building has wood lap siding, install siding vents in areas where blistering has occurred. Repair loose caulking and consider installing vents or exhaust fans. Remove blisters by scraping and sanding, prime any areas where bare wood shows, and repaint.

If the blisters do not go all the way down to the substrate, the problem is probably not related to moisture from behind.

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Blistering

The formation of dome-shaped bubbles resulting from localized loss of adhesion and lifting of the paint film from the underlying surface.

Possible Causes

Painting in direct sunlight on a surface that is too warm, especially when applying a dark-colored solvent-based coating.

Applying an oil-based or alkyd paint over a damp or wet surface.

Excess humidity or other moisture escaping from within the home through the exterior walls (less likely with latex paints, which allow water vapor to escape without affecting the integrity of the paint film).

Exposure of a latex paint film to excessive moisture in the form of dew, high humidity or rain shortly after the paint has dried, especially if there was inadequate surface preparation and/or a lower quality paint was applied.

Alligatoring

The patterned cracking in the surface of the paint film resembling the regular scales of an alligator.

Possible Causes

Applying an extremely hard coating, like an alkyd enamel, over a very soft surface.

Applying a topcoat before the undercoat is dry.

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Blistering Solutions:

The blisters are likely due to painting a heated surface in direct sunshine or exposing the paint film to excessive moisture from dew, high humidity or rain. In any case, the surface should be thoroughly scraped, primed where bare wood is exposed and coated with our top quality exterior paint.

Alligatoring Solutions:

Old paint should be completely removed by scraping and sanding the surface; a heat gun can be used to speed work on large surfaces. The surface should be primed with a high quality latex or oil primer, then painted with our top quality exterior latex house paint.

Alligatoring cont.

Possible Causes

Natural aging of oil-based paints in extreme freeze/thaw climates where the moisture absorption/drying out process, in conjunction with everyday expansion and contraction, results in a loss of paint film elasticity.

Cracking & Flaking

The splitting of a dry paint film through at least one coat as a result of aging, which ultimately will lead to complete failure of the paint. In its early stages, the problem appears as hairline cracks or "checking"; in its later stages, flaking occurs.

Possible Causes

Use of lower quality paint that has inadequate adhesion and flexibility.

Overthinning of paint or spreading the paint too thin.

Inadequate surface preparation, especially when the paint is applied to bare wood without first applying a primer.

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Cracking & Flaking Solutions:

If the cracking does not penetrate down to the substrate, it may be possible to correct the problem by removing the loose or flaking paint with a scraper or wire brush, sanding the surface, then using exterior filler to level the surface before priming any bare spots and repainting. If the cracking goes down to the substrate, remove all the paint through scraping, sanding and/or use of a heat gun; then prime and repaint. In either case, apply a top quality acrylic latex paint to help prevent reoccurrence.

Quick Answers to the Most Common Questions about Exterior Painting

With so many exterior coatings to choose from, and so many different types of surfaces to be coated, there is a great deal to know about exterior painting. Still, most homeowners ask the same few questions about house painting.

Below is a sampling of the most common questions and some abbreviated answers. For more detailed advice, you should speak to one of our knowledgeable salespersons.

Question:

How do I prepare an exterior surface for painting?

Answer: Any surface that you intend to paint should be sound and clean. When painting wood, remove any loose, flaking or peeling paint by sanding, scraping or wire brushing. Then clean the surface with a power washer, or scrub with soap and water and follow with a thorough rinsing. *Note:* Power washers are not recommended for cedar siding.

Question: When do I need to apply a primer?

Answer: Generally speaking, a primer should be applied to any surface that has never been painted before. When repainting, a primer is needed when the surface has been patched, is uneven in porosity, or when the surface has been stripped of paint or is worn down to the substrate (bare wood is a good example). Primers can also be used as a "tie-coat" to permit top coat adhesion to difficult substrates such as gloss alkyds.

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Surface Preparation:

Paint will not adhere to an “unstable” surface such as old paint that exhibits marginal adhesion. Scraping is the usual method of removing this type of surface, but it can require special attention. That’s because the paint remaining after the worst has been scraped off will probably have rough edges. The preventative measure is to taper the edges of the old paint by “feather sanding” from the old paint to the new exposed surface. However, don’t be too aggressive with your feather sanding. Professional painters report that power sanding may generate enough heat to degrade the adhesion of the old paint, resulting in failures.

Quick Answers to the Most Common Questions about Exterior Painting

Question: Am I better off applying a water-based latex paint or an oil-based paint?

Answer: That depends. Top quality latex paints generally have excellent adhesion to most surfaces and they exhibit superior resistance to bleaching and fading when compared to oil-based paints. Oil based paints are better when painting in cold weather, painting bare wood, painting over stained/ discolored surfaces and painting on a surface that is subject to abrasion or chemical resistance such as hand rails. If you are repainting a heavily chalked surface, your best choice is a high quality oil-based paint.

Question: Can water-based latex paint be applied over oil-based paint?

Answer: Today’s high quality acrylic latex paints provide excellent adhesion to surfaces painted with oil-based or alkyd paints. But if a surface has more than three or four coats of oil-based paint on it, you may want to apply an oil-based or alkyd topcoat.

Question: Are there any guidelines to follow when selecting the degree of glossiness for the new paint?

Answer: Yes, high gloss and semi-gloss paints are more stain resistant and easier to clean than are flat finishes, so they are good choices for areas like exterior doors, windows and trim. Gloss paints are also more mildew resistant than flat paints, but higher gloss paints emphasize surface imperfections as a result, flat paints are preferable for dented or irregular surfaces.

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Using a Primer:

The benefits of using an appropriate primer are consistent with those gained from good surface preparation.

They include maximizing all of the following:

- Adhesion of the finish coat
- Uniformity of sheen or gloss
- Hiding and holding uniformity
- Gloss development of the finish coat
- Mildew resistance
- Lack of discoloration from the substrate

In general, prime any surface that has not been previously painted. Also prime any surface areas exposed by loss of paint, such as those that have peeled after years of exposure or have been exposed as part of the surface preparation.

Quick Answers to the Most Common Questions about Exterior Painting

Question: Is it worth spending the extra money for a top quality paint?

Answer: Absolutely. According to the Paint Quality Institute, the highest grade of paint within a manufacturer's line of coatings always offers the best value because it will look better longer and provide years of extra service. For most exterior applications, the best paint is a top quality acrylic latex paint. The product may cost a few dollars more per gallon, but it can extend the life of the paint job to 10 years or more (compared with three or four years of service for ordinary paint).

Question: Is it always necessary to apply two coats of an exterior paint?

Answer: The best exterior paint system consists of a coat of quality primer, followed by two coats of top quality paint. However, if the surface was previously painted and the old paint is still sound, even a single coat of a top grade paint will provide good protection from the elements.

Questions: What are the best weather conditions for exterior painting?

Answer: Ideally, you should choose a mild day when the temperature is between 50°F and 86°F (10°C and 30°C), with little or no wind. It's also best to avoid painting directly in the hot sun, since the surface of your house can be 50°F to 68°F (10°C to 20°C) hotter than the air temperature.

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