



Store and Dispose of Paint Properly

Do you want to ensure your paint is properly stored so that it's good later? Have paint cans that you need to get rid of, but you don't know how? Here's how to safely store and dispose of your paint.

Storage

Seal it Up

Seal the paint can properly before you put it away to keep the paint from drying up. If any paint has gotten in the grooves of the paint can, wipe it with a clean rag. Use a rubber mallet to tap the lid down securely. Don't use a hammer - it can distort the lid, making it more difficult to securely seal the can. If you don't have a mallet, you can cover the can with a piece of wood and then hammer the lid closed.

Location

Store paint in a cool, dark location like a basement. If you do store it in the basement, make sure that it's on a shelf. Moisture from basement floors can rust your paint cans. If you don't have a basement, place them in a cabinet or closet in your house. Extreme hot or cold temperatures can ruin paint. Cold weather can cause latex paint to separate, making it unusable. Heat can dry it out. Very hot temperatures can even trigger a fire with oil-based paints.

Space Savers

If you have cans that are halfway or almost empty, transfer the remaining paint into quart cans or large jars. Then use some labels and a marker to list the brand, paint name, date of purchase, mixture number and the room that you painted. Place a small dollop of paint on the top or side of the can to easily identify the color. If you have more than one color for a room (such as wall color and trim), keep them together. If you're feeling especially organized, you can use a label maker and mark each room on the shelf front.

Reopening a Can

Opening a paint can after it's been sealed for a long time can be difficult. But avoid using a screwdriver to open it. The lid can become warped and it will be difficult to seal it in the future. Use a key that's especially designed for opening paint cans. Lowe's will give you one with your paint purchase.

Shelf Life

Latex or water-based paint typically has a shelf life of ten years. Solvent or oil-based paint can last up to fifteen years. You can test to see if your paint is still good by doing the following:

Latex

First, smell it. Does it smell rancid? If it does, it's gone bad. Secondly, check to see if the paint is separated. There will usually be a thin skin on top with a layer of liquid underneath. Remove the skin and using a paint stick, stir the paint. Check to make sure that the paint isn't hard on the bottom or the sides. If the paint blends together smoothly and appears to be the original color, then it's OK to use. If you're still unsure, brush some of the paint onto a piece of newspaper. If the paint comes out rough and lumpy, you need to dispose of it.

Oil-Based

If it hasn't been exposed to extreme temperatures and was sealed properly, then oil-based paint typically isn't as susceptible to going bad as latex. Just remove the layer of film across the top and stir it well before painting.

Disposal

Paint can be toxic and dangerous to the environment if not disposed of properly. Follow these steps for safely getting rid of that extra paint that you no longer need.

Latex Paints

Step 1

Here's how to dispose of latex paint without taking it to a recycling center.

Add equal parts cat litter to latex paint in the can. If you have more than a half a can, you can also pour the paint into a lined box or trash can. Then pour in cat litter.

Step 2

Stir the cat litter into the paint until it thickens and will not spill. Allow the mixture to sit for one hour.

Step 3

Throw the dried paint in the can in the garbage. Make sure to remove the lid.

Good to Know

If you don't have much paint left in the can, you can just remove the lid and let the paint dry out on its own. Make sure that it's in a location where small children or pets can't get to it.

There are also commercial paint hardeners that you can purchase if you prefer not to use cat litter. Just follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Oil-Based Paints

Step 1

Oil-based paints are considered hazardous waste and must be taken to a recycling center.

To find a place to safely dispose of your latex and oil-based paints, use our [Recycling Center Locator](#).

Good to Know

Consider donating your paint to a community center, charity, place of worship, local theater or Habitat for Humanity ReStore. They're often working on projects with a limited budget and could use the extra supplies.