

# HOME

# EXPRESSIONS

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## Primers help solve multiple paint problems

Without proper information, selecting the right primer for a paint job can be as confusing as choosing the right paint. There are primers for wood, metal and masonry. There are latex and oil-based (alkyd) primers. And there are sealers that aren't exactly primers, but are close cousins.

To avoid confusion, it's necessary to first understand the role of a primer and how it can improve a paint's performance and longevity.

The purpose of a primer is simple: to help create a tight bond between the paint and the surface to be painted. Simply speaking, the primer helps paint get a better "grip" on a bare surface by making the surface

more uniform and accepting for a top coat. In addition, the primer helps prevent stains and tannins from seeping through the paint.

Knowing when to use a primer is largely a matter of common sense. Primers should be applied over surfaces that have never been painted before like new wood and plaster. When repainting, primers are needed in two instances: when a surface is uneven; or when the surface has been stripped or worn down to the original substrate.

But primers can also solve some sticky problems that require more than a simple coat of paint. Most can do one or more of the following:

- ✓ keep iron and steel from rusting;

- ✓ help cover stains and graffiti; hide water damage;

- ✓ seal off knots and sap streaks in wood;

- ✓ prevent bleed-through from "staining woods" like cedar and redwood;

- ✓ seal porous surfaces like sheetrock, cured plaster and weathered masonry;

- ✓ help paint adhere to slick surfaces such as tile and high-gloss enamels.

While primers are effective problem solvers, however, they can hide only so much. If a stain is caused by a leaky water pipe, for example, it is important to fix the leak before using the primer to conceal the stain.

Sealers, although they are similar to primers, are designed to serve a different purpose. They are commonly applied before painting so that the surface will not absorb the paint.

Typically, sealers are used to coat wood or masonry surfaces that have areas with varying degrees of porosity. If a sealer were not applied to these surfaces, the finished job would not look smooth and uniform. Instead, the more porous areas would look "flatter" than the non-porous areas and the effect would be very unflattering.

Even after deciding that a primer or sealer will improve the final appearance of a paint job, it still is important to choose the right type of product for the project at hand. To that end, it is important to know that there are two general types of primers and sealers: latex or water-based products; and alkyd or oil-based products.

Alkyd products were once the only choice available. But with the development of latex primers and sealers that contain state-of-the-art acrylics, today these products perform just as well as their alkyd counterparts in many applications.

And latex products have some big advantages. For example, latex products are easier to work with since they clean up easily with soap and water. And unlike alkyd primers and sealers, acrylic latex products do not have a strong odor.

Armed with this basic information, you should be able to determine when you need a primer or sealer, and have an idea of the type you would prefer. But if you need more advice, ask for help at your local paint or hardware store, or decorating centre. A knowledgeable salesperson can help you select the product that is best for your needs.

## Use common sense when painting

At one time or another, nearly all of us tackle a home painting project. But all too often, we ignore proper safety precautions.

To help ensure that your next exterior painting project is both successful and safe, follow these tips:

### Use of ladders

Exterior painting projects almost always involve ladders. And ladder misuse is the cause of many a miscue when painting.

After you remove your ladder from the garage or tool shed, take time to inspect it. Is it in good repair? Are all the rungs intact and free of dirt or paint buildup that could interfere with footing? Be certain.

When raising the ladder to paint, make sure that the base is level and that it sits firmly on the ground. Also check to see if the ground is solid. A ladder can slip in unstable soil or mud.

Keep the angle of the ladder at about 15 degrees. If you are using an extension ladder, stay off the top three rungs; stay off the top two steps of a stepladder. Wrap cloth around the tops of the ladder to protect the siding and prevent slipping.

When applying paint, don't reach out too far. Always keep your hips between the rails of the ladder. And when scraping or doing repairs, use care when applying force, as this can cause the ladder to slip.

Keep your ladder away from power lines, especially if it is made of metal. And never climb a ladder that is wet.

### Proper clothing

When climbing a ladder, be sure to wear non-slip shoes. Tennis shoes or work boots are good choices.

If you are using bleach solution to remove mildew, wear eye goggles and rubber gloves and avoid working on a windy day. Should bleach solution come in contact with your skin, rinse well with cold water and see the label on the bleach for further instructions.

When wire-brushing or scraping old paint, use gloves to avoid cutting or jabbing your hands.

### Power equipment

Be especially careful if you are using power tools for your house painting.

If you are using power washing equipment, keep the nozzle pointed away from you and others. Don't try to clean windows with a power washer; the spray may be powerful enough to shatter the glass.

Wear a hood with a respirator and clothes that cover every part of your body if you are spray painting with oil-based (alkyd) paint.

### Fire safety

Since oil-based paint is combustible, don't smoke when using it.

If there is wet paint or thinner on your rags or drop-cloths, spread them out to dry, or place them in a tight metal container away from heat sources and materials that can easily catch fire.

Safe painting is largely a matter of common sense. If you question whether something is safe, it probably isn't. Good luck and good painting!

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