

How to Paint Walls and Ceilings

By Joyce Jackson

Paint is one of the easiest ways to give a room a fresh new look.

It can create the illusion of a different sized room or you can use it to highlight an interesting architectural feature.

To ensure that you get professional results, it's a good idea to visit your local paint, hardware, or home improvement store for the right tools. The store clerk can also help you determine the best paint for the room and calculate the amount you will need to complete the job. You will find a variety of brushes, rollers, paint trays, extension poles, ladders, putty knives and paint edgers to help make the job easier. You will also need primer, spackling compound, a damp sponge, sandpaper, rags, painter's tape, drop cloths, plastic sheets, and rubber gloves. If you will be painting the ceiling it's a good idea to wear a mask, goggles, and hair covering.

The color you select to paint the ceiling is extremely important. A lighter color is recommended for a low ceiling in a small room, while a darker color can bring more warmth to a large room with a very high ceiling.

Remove as much furniture as possible from the room. Everything you can't remove will have to be moved to the center of the room and covered with drop cloths. Be sure to cover the floor with plastic sheeting. If you are painting the ceiling you will need to remove fixtures such as ceiling fans and light fixtures. Prepare the walls for painting by removing curtains, drapery hardware, electrical switch plates, pictures, wall shelves, etc.

Apply spackle with a putty knife to fill holes and dents in the walls. Let it dry overnight and use a fine-grit sandpaper to smooth the area the next day. Wipe the walls from the bottom up to remove dirt, cobwebs, and dust. Rinse with clean water and a sponge. Allow drying and placing painter's tape on molding and windowsills.

New walls and patched or repaired areas need to be primed before painting. Priming will seal the surface and help the paint adhere more evenly. If you plan to paint a surface that has existing high gloss paint, you should also prime it before repainting.

Paint the room from top to bottom. It is best to paint the ceiling first, followed by the walls, windows, doors and trim. If you will be using very light and very dark colors, apply the lighter paint color first.

A paint extension pole allows you to stand on the floor to paint the ceiling rather than using a ladder. (If you have vaulted ceilings, you may have to use a ladder along with the extension pole.) If you are painting a textured ceiling, you will need to use a thick-nap roller to get complete coverage over the textured surface. For a smooth ceiling, a roller with a smooth or short nap should work fine.

Use painter's tape to mask around trim and the area where the wall meets the ceiling. If walls and ceiling will be the same color, you can skip this step.

Begin in the corner of the room and paint the ceiling edge along the walls using a paint edger. You can roll the paint on using diagonal motions and fill in the open areas by cross rolling.

To paint your walls, first dip the roller in the paint tray and roll it back and forth on the ridged part at the tray top to distribute the paint evenly. Apply in a large "M" shape starting in a corner near the ceiling. Fill each area by rolling across the "M." Move along the walls painting in 4 ft. x 4-ft. blocks from the ceiling to the floor. Paint the next block before the previous one dries so that edges can be blended together seamlessly. If you are using high-gloss or semi-gloss paint, you will probably want to paint smaller sections (2 ft. x 2 ft.).

Use two- or three-inch brushes to apply paint in corners, around doors and windows, and above the baseboard or other areas where a paint roller won't reach.

Let the walls dry completely (three hours or longer) and apply a second coat if necessary. (When you prime the ceiling or walls, one coat of paint is usually sufficient.) After the second coat has dried, paint windows and woodwork.