

Paint Dos and Don'ts

Paint is a common product that can become a household hazardous material when it is not used up. Some paint contains chemicals, such as solvents and metals, that can damage the environment and endanger human health if disposed of improperly.

What to Do

The easiest way to dispose of paint is to use it up. Try to buy only the amount you need for a job. If you have a little left over, apply an extra coat, paint a fence, dog house or bird house. If you do not have future use for the paint, give it to someone who does. Usable paint can be given to friends, neighbors, relatives. Other possible local outlets include community service organizations, theater groups, sign painters, building contractors, or recreation departments.

Nearly empty latex paints that are not usable can be dried out in a well-ventilated area away from children and pets. Once the paint is dried, it can be disposed of in the trash. Keep the lid off of it so the trash hauler knows it is empty. Dried or solidified paint does not present a hazard to the environment.

Non-latex paints, and paints that cannot be dried or used up can be brought to the household hazardous material collection site.

Is It Usable?

To tell if your paint is usable, stir it - if the ingredients blend readily, the paint is probably usable. As a general rule, for paint to be usable by someone else, at least one third of the contents should remain in the original can that has a legible label.

Oil-based paint can be good for up to fifteen years. Latex paint is usable if it is less than ten years old and has not been repeatedly frozen and thawed. The best way to see if latex paint is usable after it has been frozen is to brush it on newspaper to see if it has any lumps. If there are lumps, the paint is not usable.

To keep paint in usable condition so that you do not have to worry about disposal, store it in a dry place where it will not freeze, out of reach of children. Make sure lids are sealed tightly.

What Not to Do

- Do not pour paint down the drain. Many of the chemicals in paint will not be treated by sewage treatment or septic systems. The untreated chemicals might be discharged to rivers and streams, and contaminate these waters.
- Do not throw paint in the trash in liquid form. In the landfill, there is a strong possibility that the paint will be released from the can. If this happens, it can seep down through the garbage and may eventually contaminate groundwater.

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