Repainting a House:
Don't Be Afraid to Spray

For each hour spent masking, you'll save eight hours of brushing and get a superior paint job

BY JON TOBEY



Making a paint job last 20 years

I offer a 20-year warranty to any homeowner willing to pay for a top-quality paint job. I've never had a callback. Here are the crucial steps:

- Fix moisture problems, such as leaky roofs, damp basements, clogged gutters and backed-up drains. Paint can't stay on a house that has water coming through the walls.
- Remove any loose paint and make sure you have a sound substrate.
- Bleach to remove mildew.
- Wash to remove dirt.
- Prime bare wood with acrylic latex primer.
- Caulk every split, crack or seam.
- Apply a thin, stain-blocking coat of alkyd primer.
- Topcoat with plenty of the best 100% acrylic latex you can buy. (Many brands offer lifetime warranties for their best paints.)

—J. T.

To paraphrase Thomas Edison: Painting is nine-tenths preparation and one-tenth application. These words are particularly true for those of us who wield a spray gun instead of a paintbrush. After several days of washing, scraping and caulking (which I'd also do if I were brushing), I have to spend another day or two carefully masking every surface that I don't want painted. Fortunately, there is an upside to all this grunt work: After just a few hours of spraying, I get to remove the masking to unveil a flawless finish with crisp lines between the body and trim.

Don't neglect the prep

If you want the job to last (sidebar facing page), you've got to prep it right. On those occasions when I have to repaint an old house that has many layers of failing paint, I'll strip off all the paint and start over with bare wood (see "Removing Exterior Paint," *FHB* #148, pp. 78-83). Fortunately, most of my jobs involve newer houses whose painted surfaces are intact but fading.

After scraping and sanding any patches of loose paint, I give the house a thorough cleaning. To get rid of mildew, I fill a garden sprayer with a mild (3:1) bleach solution and soak every square inch of the painted surfaces. Then I give the house a thorough, careful pressure-washing. I pressure-wash from the top down so that I'm constantly working from a clean surface into a dirty one. Word of warning: In the wrong hands, a pressure washer can do a lot of damage. If you've never used a pressure washer, have an experienced operator teach you how to use it, or hire a professional.

After the pressure-washing is done, I pull off the job for at least 24 hours to give the surface time to dry. When I return, I prime any bare wood with Sherwin-Williams A-100 acrylic latex primer (Sherwin-Williams Co.; 800-336-1110; www.sherwin-williams.com).

Then I start caulking. Every split, crack or seam that could compromise the paint gets

SPECIAL TOOLS MAKE MASKING EASY, IF NOT FUN

Masking off areas that don't get painted (or that have already been painted) is the grunt work of spray-painting, but the right tools get the job done quickly.



Dual-Tac does windows. *A Dual-Tac dispenser (3M Co.; 800-480-1704; www.3m.com) joins two tapes to create a double-sided masking tape. Tape the perimeter of window glazing (photo bottom left), cover with plastic (photo bottom center), and trim off the excess with a razor blade (photo below).*









Hand-Masker covers the wide stuff. *A Hand-Masker M3000 Dispenser (also from 3M) fashions a giant swath of protection by adding a strip of tape to the edge of a wide roll of masking paper.*



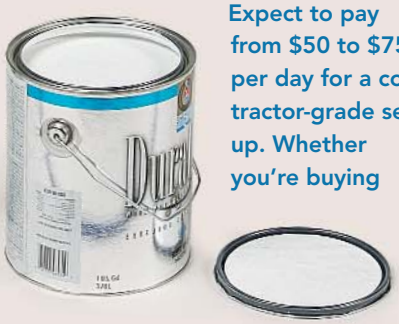




Handheld shield masks on the fly. *A 4-ft. wide painting shield (Hyde Tools; 800-872-4933; www.hydetools.com) can prevent overspray. Covering the shield with layers of paper tape and removing each one as it becomes fouled keeps the working surface drip-free.*

Spray equipment is not complicated (and you can rent it)





The standard paint-sprayer setup consists of the pump that draws the paint out of the can (photo left), and the hose and gun that deliver it (photos left, facing page). A professional setup like the one shown here (Graco Inc.; 800-328-0211; www.graco.com) retails for about $1,200, but I bought used equipment for less than $500.

Back when I was still predominantly a brush painter, I rented spray equipment when I needed it. I usually rented from my paint supplier because it was convenient, but also because they stocked all the spray tips and accessories I might need. Expect to pay from $50 to $75 per day for a contractor-grade setup. Whether you're buying new or renting, make sure the dealer fully explains how to operate the equipment you'll be using; it's also a good idea to read the owner's manual. Following are a few of the lessons I've learned over the years.

- Before starting the spray pump, always make sure that the priming lever is off, the pressure is turned down and the safety lock on the spray gun is engaged.
- If you don't know what the unit was last used for, circulate a gallon of clean paint thinner through the lines.
- At the end of every workday, soak the spray tip and filter (photo top left, facing page) in xylene solvent.
- Replace the filter regularly, but never with anything coarser than medium (100 mesh), or the junk that gets past the filter will become stuck in the tip.
- Replace spray tips at the first sign of wear; a worn tip produces an uneven coat and wastes a lot of paint.

—*J. T.*

caulked and tooled; I tool with a wet finger and a rag.

A high-quality sprayed finish requires plenty of masking

The basic ingredients for masking an exterior spray-painting job are high-density painter's plastic and top-quality 1½-in. tape; I use 3M #2040. This tape is pricey, but it sticks where it's put and peels off easily.

I paint trim surfaces first, so I'm not concerned about overspray getting on the siding. At this stage, I mask only unpainted surfaces, such as brick, patios, roofs and glass.

I generally rely on drop cloths to cover the edges of roofs, decks and patios. But to ensure a perfect edge along the spray line, I tape down a 12-in. wide strip of masking paper; an ingenious tool called a Hand-Masker, from 3M Co., makes this job effortless (center photos, p. 85). After the taping is done, I slip the edge of the drop cloth under the loose edge of the paper. When overspray is only a minor concern, the 12-in. masking paper is all the protection I need.

After all the big surfaces are covered, I start masking the glass, leaving muntins, mullions and brick mold exposed. I do this tedious job quickly using a Dual-Tac tape dispenser. This tool (top photo, p. 85) creates a double-sided tape by combining one tape that's specially designed to stick to glass with another tape that's designed to grab onto plastic and not let go. Unfortunately, I recently found out that the manufacturer (3M Co.) has decided to discontinue this tool in the near future. I'm told that they will continue to make the tapes for a while, but I'd urge anyone who's interested in spray-painting to stock up now.

At the doors, I remove the weatherstripping and carefully mask the edges to prevent decorating the inside of the house. After all the doors and windows are covered, I mask any lamps or fixtures that might be in the line of fire. Then I'm ready to start painting.

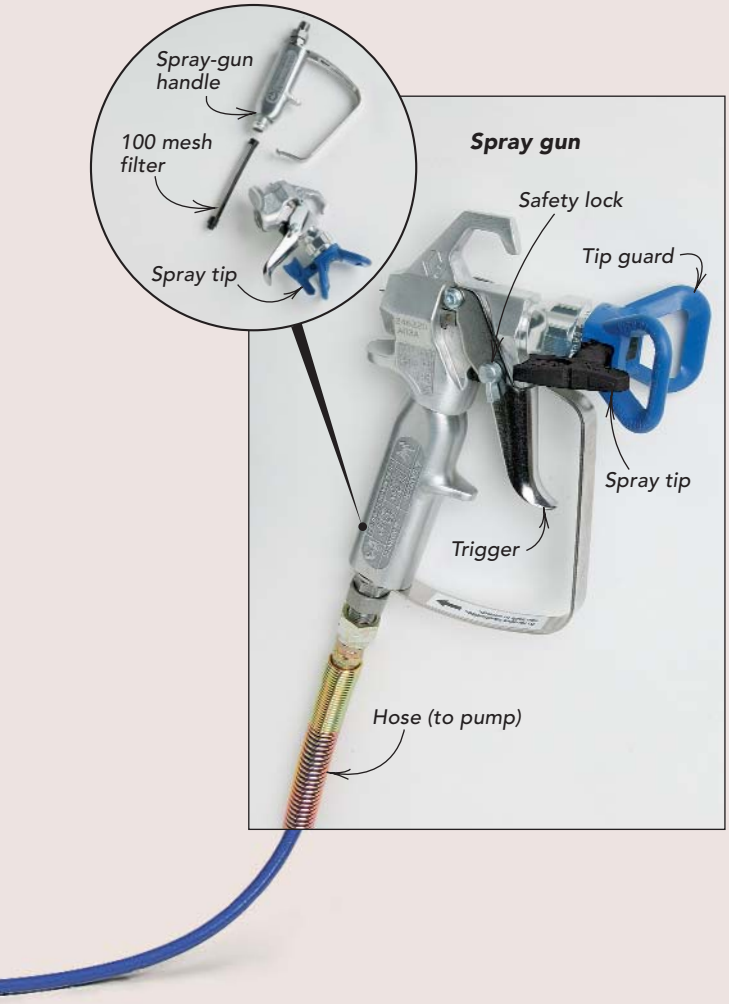
Spray all the trim surfaces first

It used to be that trim was always painted with oil-based paint—even when the body was done in latex—because oil tended to level out better when brushed. These days, latex has surpassed oil in every respect, so I use a top-quality acrylic latex product called Duration from Sherwin-Williams for all my exterior painting. Unfortunately, I can't spray the entire house at the same time because even if the colors are identical, I always use a satin finish on the clapboards, and a gloss, or at least a semigloss, on the trim. The gloss finish really makes the trim stand out from the clapboards, but it also makes gutters and other messy surfaces much easier to clean.

For spraying trim surfaces, I outfit my spray gun with a compact (#213) spray tip (sidebar facing page), and I set the sprayer to the lowest possible pressure that still produces an even fan of paint. When I'm spray-painting trim, I always wear a hat, gloves and an organic filter respirator.

As with pressure-washing, I start at the top and work my way down. Instead of drop cloths, I often use a 4-ft. wide painting shield to protect the roof as I spray the gutter and fascia (photo left, facing page). Using a shield, especially on a ladder, is tricky, but the

Top photos this page, facing page: Scott Phillips



SPRAY TIPS VARY BY APPLICATION

A spray tip controls the pattern as well as the volume of paint that's ejected from the gun. A three-digit code differentiates various spray tips: The first number (from 2-9) designates half the width of the fan of paint a particular tip will produce 12 in. away from the tip. The second number (from 00-99) indicates the size of the opening, measured in thousandths of an inch. A #517 tip, for example, produces a 10-in. fan while sending paint through a relatively large 0.017-in. orifice.

—J. T.

SAFETY TIP

Never operate a spray gun without the guard that surrounds the tip. And never touch the tip while spraying paint. Such contact is called an injection, and the treatment is to go directly to the hospital and have the surrounding flesh removed.

My favorite tips for exterior applications



Compact low-volume tip for trim



Wide low-volume tip for primer



Wide high-volume tip for siding



Extra-large high-volume tip for siding (This tip requires an experienced hand.)

SPRAY THE TRIM FIRST

Unlike brushing, spray-painting is a back-and-forth dance: First you mask; then you paint the trim; then you mask again.





Start at the top and work your way down. *Use shields to control overspray when painting fascia boards (photo above). To ensure consistent coverage, hold the tip of the spray gun about 12 in. away from the surface (photo right); keep the spray flow perpendicular to the surface; and apply paint in long, smooth strokes.*

effort is worthwhile. It took me two hours to spray all of the soffits, fascia boards and gutters on the house in the photos, a job that would have taken me two full days if I had used a brush.

After the high work is done, I move on to the windows, doors and other trim. To ensure consistent coverage, I hold the spray tip about 12 in. away from the surface and move the gun in a smooth, even stroke (photo bottom right, p. 87). I carefully check for runs when painting muntins and other window trim because each piece will be hit several times from different angles.

Seconds on masking

After the trim surfaces have dried (usually 24 hours to 48 hours), most of them need to be masked in preparation for spraying the siding. I generally don't mask fascias and gutters because I rely on the paint shield to control the overspray. Windows and doors are another story.

I cover the windows and the doors of the house by applying a continuous length of tape around the face of the brick mold, flush with the outside edge (top photo). Then I carefully lift the tape's inside edge and tuck the plastic under. After the windows and the doors all have been masked, other miscellaneous trim elements are covered with the paper tape from the Hand-Masker.

I didn't spread out drop cloths when I was spraying trim because the tight spray pattern and low pressure delivery kept overspray under control. That won't be the case when I spray the siding.

Before spraying the siding on the house, I cover everything (bottom photo). I don't want to damage the plants that I'm trying to protect, so I never cover them with clear plastic drop cloths: Sunlight can burn a plant under plastic in minutes. Even when I'm using breathable cotton drop cloths, I remove them as soon as possible. For delicate or thorny plants, I carry a supply of light metal fence posts that I set in the ground to support the drop cloths.

MASK THE TRIM AND SPRAY THE SIDING

Once the paint is dry, trim surfaces are masked carefully; then the siding is primed and painted.





Cover the window to protect the trim. *After the trim paint has dried (24 to 48 hours), the outside edges of door and window trim are taped carefully. Then the inside edges of the tape are peeled back, and plastic is tucked underneath.*

Fog coat ensures consistent finish coat. *To prevent tannins from bleeding through the topcoat, the author applies a nearly transparent undercoating of a fast-drying alkyd primer (Sherwin-Williams Co.; 800-336-1110; www.sherwin-williams.com).*

A light coat of oil-based primer prevents bleed-through

Once the house is completely masked and the ground surfaces are covered, I suit up for spraying. Then I break out the painting equipment, set up the gun with a wider (#511) tip and spray an extra-light ("fog") coat of Sherwin-Williams Problock fast-drying alkyd (oil) primer over the entire house (bottom photo). This treatment prevents tannins in the wood from bleeding through the paint. Despite my love for latex, a water-based product is not capable of blocking the water-soluble tannins. Fortunately, in my experience, a nearly transparent fog coat of primer is thick enough to prevent any bleed-through, yet thin enough to avoid the brittleness and

Embrace the waste:
Recycle used thinner

Nothing sickens me more than the sight of used paint thinner being poured down a storm drain. This is not only an environmental travesty, but it's also a waste of perfectly good solvent.

I don't use many products that require thinner, but when I do, I recycle all my used thinner by pouring it back into a specially marked 5-gal. can. After a few weeks, the solid particles settle to the bottom, and the clean thinner is decanted and reused. When I've accumulated enough sludge, I drop it off at my local recycling facility.

If all you spray is latex paint, wastewater from cleaning out the spray equipment is disposed of legally by being flushed down a toilet connected to a public sewer system, not a septic system, a storm drain or a hole in the ground.

—J. T.





Siding is brushed after it's sprayed. *With a spray gun in one hand and a paintbrush in the other, the author coats every surface that's comfortably within arm's length (photo left). Then he brushes to force the paint into all of the nooks and crannies (photo above).*

resulting failure associated with full-strength alkyd coatings.

Siding is sprayed and brushed

The fast-dry primer is ready to cover in an hour, which gives me enough time to flush out the sprayer with mineral spirits and switch over to latex. I use a satin sheen for all the house paint. Satin gives the house a long-lasting, fresh look, and it is more resistant to mildew than a flat finish. For spraying the topcoat, I set the gun up with a larger (#621) tip.

Direct sun dries paint too quickly, so I begin on the shady side of the house. I start on top, shielding the fascia and gutters while I spray the underside of the eaves. Unless a client requests otherwise, I typically paint eaves and soffits the same color as the siding.

For maximum efficiency, I usually start with the spray gun in my right hand and climb up the ladder, spraying everything within arm's reach (photo above left), including through the ladder rungs. Then I switch to my left hand and walk down the ladder, spraying everything I can reach comfortably on the other side. Afterward, I reach for a 4-in. paintbrush and back-brush the whole shebang (photo above right). Back-brushing enables me to work the paint into all the rough fibers and knotholes, ensuring an even coat of paint throughout. Latex paint skins over quickly, especially on a warm day, so I never leave any paint on a surface for more than five minutes before I brush it.

As soon as I finish spraying, I start removing the masking. I work from the top down, gently peeling the tape away from the surface to prevent yanking off fresh trim paint (photo to right). I bundle all the masking painted side in and stuff it into empty paint cans for disposal. As I work my way around the house, I always get a huge rush of accomplishment as the ugly duckling rapidly transforms into a beautiful swan. □

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The moment of truth. *As soon as the spray gun is unplugged, the masking is ready to come off. Pulling from the top down, the author gently removes tape and plastic to reveal smooth paint and crisp lines.*