3 SELECTING PAINT COLORS
Learn how to match different shades and test them in your room before you commit.

4 PAINTING A ROOM 101

10 HOW TO CHOOSE CARPET
Find out what to know before buying carpet, and see our glossary of styles and fibers.

14 DO-IT-YOURSELF IDEAS
Get tips on arranging pictures on your wall, lining drawers with pretty paper, and more.
When it comes to choosing colors, we often concern ourselves with what’s “pretty,” or what “matches.” And when all else fails, we fall back on our old favorites. Such attitudes aren’t necessarily wrong, but they can limit the ability to see color for what it is. After all, a so-called pretty color like sky blue can look cold on the walls of a living room, whereas an “ugly” olive drab might appear quite beautiful in contrast with warm wood floors. Color interacts with everything it comes into visual contact with, including distant surfaces that appear layered in your line of sight. And all these juxtapositions determine whether or not a particular color will delight, or disappoint, your eye.

Combining colors isn’t a simple matter of addition, for every color is modified and transformed by the colors around it. Placed side by side, the similarities of two colors will cancel one another out, and their differences will be intensified. So two yellows that appear nearly identical when viewed in isolation may reveal shades of peach and lime when they meet. The effect can be even more dramatic when dissimilar colors abut. A yellow that appears insipid against a white background becomes soft and luminous when paired with a deep, warm gray. Because layering colors plays up the slightest differences between them, even a collection of plain neutrals can become a dramatic palette.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about which colors combine well and which do not, but a few tricks can help you arrive at a pleasing palette. Colors that clash can be brought into sync by adjusting their value (lightness or darkness) and saturation (purity or muddiness). Vivid blue and orange, for example, would be a difficult pair to live with, but cool stone gray looks gorgeous next to burnt umber. The most soothing interiors are those where colors are in balance. Areas of intense color—a brick-red sofa, for example—are offset by a strong neutral background, like a dark khaki or mouse gray.

Choosing a group of paint colors that works together is only the first step. You also have to decide which goes where—and no two rooms will have the same effect on a color. Painted walls will pick up the red of an oriental rug and the yellow of pine floorboards. They will look blue in rooms with a northern exposure, and gold in rooms bathed in sunlight. Even within a single room, the walls will change color throughout the course of the day. Test colors by painting bold swatches on the walls to be painted, to see how they’ll look in actual light. A preview like this will help you adjust color to suit your own available light. A southern exposure will make any color seem yellower; northern light is whiter and less distorting, while eastern and western exposures are changeable.

If a room will be used primarily at night, test colors in artificial light. Incandescent light is much yellower than sunlight; fluorescent is white and tends to sap warmth away.
In theory, we all know how to paint a room. Dip a brush or roller in a color and spread it over the wall. But painting neatly and efficiently using the foremost methods and tools? That’s a skill most of us could brush up on. To that end, we’ve put together a guide detailing what you need to know to achieve a flawless finish in any space. The products on these pages are for use with latex paint. (Many states have laws restricting the sale of oil-based varieties because of environmental concerns.) First, consider the finish you want. Flat is most commonly used on walls; however, some people prefer satin or eggshell finishes. Semigloss is primarily used on trim. Shinier paints are ideal for kitchens and bathrooms because they are easy to clean, but they’re also more apt to show imperfections on the wall. With any finish, allow enough time to complete your project; the average room takes about four days, including drying time. So go ahead and paint a glorious mental picture: Do you see soothing blue walls or maybe creamy yellow? Then get to work—a professional-quality job awaits.
Joint tape, tack cloths, tray liners, and more—painting a room requires a variety of specialty products. Use this glossary to determine what to have on hand before you get started.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Masking Paper and Drop Cloths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Spackling Paste, Wood Filler, and Putty Knife</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Line hard floors with brown masking or builders’ paper, which absorbs spills, and tape it down around the room’s edge. Cover carpeting with canvas drop cloths (paper tears in deep pile) and furniture with plastic ones.</td>
<td>Cover holes in walls with spackling paste and those in trim and molding with wood filler. Choose a flexible putty knife for these tasks. (Sturdier ones are better for scraping.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Joint Tape, Joint Compound, and Taping Knife</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sanding Paper, Sanding Sponge, and Dust Mask</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patch cracks in walls with fiberglass-mesh joint tape (the self-adhesive kind is the simplest to work with) and joint compound applied with a broad, 6- to 12-inch taping knife.</td>
<td>You’ll need coarse (80 to 100 grit), medium (120 to 150 grit), and fine (220 grit) sandpaper for smoothing filled holes and cracks; a sanding sponge, which can be cleaned and reused, is a newer option. Wear a mask for heavy sanding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Caulk and Caulking Gun</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rags, Sponges, and Tack Cloths</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caulk is loaded into a dispenser gun and used to fill cracks between unlike materials, such as wood trim and plaster walls. Look for labels that say “paintable latex” or “paintable acrylic latex,” which are easy to clean up with a damp sponge.</td>
<td>For cleanup, cotton rags made for painting (they give off little lint) are invaluable. Use medium-size sponges to wipe down walls and smooth caulk. Tack cloths, which are sticky, remove fine dust from surfaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Tape</strong></th>
<th><strong>5-In-1 Tool</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Painters’ masking tape helps ensure a clean line between the wall and the ceiling or trim. Also use it for painting windows. It’s sold based on degree of adhesion, so select the one that’s appropriate for your surface, such as low tack for glass or high tack for textured walls such as brick.</td>
<td>This handy multitasker performs even more functions than its name suggests. Use it to open paint cans, tear masking tape, scrape paint, clean roller sleeves, and remove debris from fissures in the wall; the square end works as a slotted screwdriver.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Brushes

The best brushes have flexible—not stiff—bristles with flagged, or split, ends, which hold more paint. Use a 3- or 4-inch brush on walls (anything larger is unwieldy); angled 1- to 2-inch ones are ideal for windows, trim, and the technique known as “cutting in”.

### Plastic Containers

Decant paint to be applied with a brush into small plastic vessels, such as those used for take-out food. (Don’t use metal containers, which can rust.) This prevents paint in cans from drying out or becoming contaminated with dust or stray bristles.

### Rollers

These come with naps of 1/8 to 2 inches or more. Usually, a 1/2-inch nap for priming and 3/8-inch for painting are best. (Textured surfaces require something fluffier.) Foam sleeves have low nap, so they work well with glossy paints, which tend to magnify roller marks.

### Paint Rollers

A good-quality roller has a cage with springs, to prevent the sleeve from slipping off, and a rigid handle with a hole in the bottom for an extension pole. Popular sizes include 9 inch, 7 inch, and 4 inch. Use the largest one that fits in the area to be covered.

### Roller Tray and Liner

Invest in a sturdy metal roller tray that resists tipping. Placing a disposable plastic liner inside the pan makes cleanup a breeze (and saves you from replacing trays caked in dried paint). Double-check that liners fit your tray, as sizing is not universal.

### Extension Pole

Anyone who has tried to balance a paint tray on a ladder will appreciate an extension pole, which snaps or screws into the end of a roller, enabling you to reach new heights. Telescoping poles, which can be adjusted in length, are handiest.

### Paint Strainer

Before working with paint from previously opened cans, pass it through a metal strainer (find one at a paint or kitchen store) to filter out any debris or dried particles. Do not use a paper strainer, which is made for thinner paints such as oil or lacquer.

### Paint Conditioner

Additives such as Floetrol emulate the smooth look of oil paint by rendering brush and roller marks less prominent. Mix a pint of conditioner with a gallon of latex paint. Test a swatch on the wall. For an even cleaner finish, add up to 1 pint more conditioner.
Plan to devote a full day to the four Ps: protecting floors and furnishings; patching holes, fissures, and gaps; prepping walls (cleaning, taping them off); and, finally, priming.

1. **SAFEGUARDING BELONGINGS**
Remove small objects from the room; gather large ones in the center and cover with a plastic drop cloth. Unscrew switch and outlet face plates. Lay masking paper over floors and tape as shown below. Protect carpeting with canvas drop cloths.

2. **FILLING HOLES**
With a flexible putty knife, apply spackling paste to nail holes in the wall and wood filler to small cavities in trim (overfill slightly, as compounds will shrink). Let dry completely, then sand using a medium-grit paper on walls and a coarse-grit one on wood.

3. **REPAIRING CRACKS**
Cover crevices in the wall with self-adhesive fiberglass-mesh joint tape. Apply a thin layer of joint compound over the tape with a flexible taping or joint knife; work quickly to smooth before the paste dries. Lightly sand with a fine-grit paper.

4. **CAULKING**
To fill cracks between the baseboard—or any trim—and the wall, apply latex caulk (which can be painted) with a caulking gun, following the manufacturer’s instructions.

5. **SMOOTHING CAULK**
Immediately after applying caulk, use a damp sponge to even it out and wipe off excess. (It is impossible to do this after caulk dries.)

6. **CLEANING AND PRIMING**
Vacuum the room and wash walls with a sponge and warm water. Tape off the ceiling, then prime walls, using techniques from “Painting Like a Pro” (next page). If you’ll be covering a light-colored wall with dark paint, use a gray primer, or have one custom-mixed to match your paint shade.
We recommend painting your walls before taping off the trim since you’ll be painting this later. Apply at least two coats to both, allowing four hours of drying time in between.

1. **DECANTING PAINT**
Flatten a cardboard box and place it under paint containers to give floors an extra layer of protection. Mix paint with a wooden stir stick, then pour some into a smaller plastic vessel, filling about halfway. (Spouts on newer containers make this easier.)

2. **DIPPING YOUR BRUSH**
Insert the bristles about 2 inches into the paint, then tap them against the sides of the container to remove excess. This minimizes the risk of drips.

3. **CUTTING IN**
Paint part of a corner or around the trim (don’t worry about taping yet) with a 2-inch angled brush. This is called “cutting in.” To avoid the marks that appear when paint starts to dry, do only 4-foot sections at a time.

4. **ROLLING ON PAINT**
Pour paint into the reservoir of your roller tray. Dip in one edge of the roller, then move it back and forth on the tray bed until it’s saturated but not dripping. Paint a 2-foot-wide V on the wall, and, without lifting the roller, fill it in with tight vertical strokes—this will ensure even coverage. Repeat, working top to bottom, until you’ve completed the wall.

5. **PAINTING A DOOR**
Remove all hardware, then sand and prime the surface. With a 3-inch roller, paint one area of the door, such as an inset panel, then immediately brush over it with a 3-inch brush. Continue working in sections until you’ve finished the body of the door, then do the stiles and rails (the vertical and horizontal framing, respectively).

6. **FINISHING TRIM AND BASEBOARDS**
Let wall paint dry overnight, then tape off the trim with painters’ masking tape, as shown. (For proper adhesion, burnish tape with your fingertips as you go.) Apply paint with an angled 2-inch brush.
1. PREPARING WINDOWS
Line the perimeter of each pane with painters’ tape, leaving 1/16 inch between the edge of the tape and the muntins. (When painted, this will create a seal that prevents moisture from getting in and rotting the wood.) Remove locks and other hardware, and clean wood with a tack cloth.

2. PAINTING TECHNIQUES
Use a 1-inch angled brush to paint the muntins and an angled 2-inch brush to do the frame, taking care to fill in your seal.

3. REMOVING EXCESS PAINT
To clean off paint that has seeped underneath the tape, lubricate a single-edge razor blade with glass cleaner—this will prevent scratches—and gently scrape the panes. (Using a razor blade on some new windows will void the warranty; doublecheck yours to be sure.)

CLEANING UP
Store leftover paint and wash brushes immediately after use, and discard roller sleeves. Here are some pointers.

4. COMPILING SUPPLIES
Keep these items in your cleaning arsenal: liquid dish soap for washing brushes, a brush comb for removing persistent particles, sponges and rags for wiping surfaces, and a razor blade for scraping windows.

5. STORING EXTRA PAINT
Transfer leftover paint to smaller air-tight plastic containers. (Paint kept in opened cans is prone to drying out.) Create labels with the name of the room the color was used in, and keep the paint on hand for touch-ups.

6. WASHING BRUSHES
Run each brush under lukewarm water, then add a few drops of liquid dish soap and continue rinsing. Dislodge dried bits with a metal brush comb. Wrap bristles in paper towels (to maintain their shape), and lay flat to dry.

This task requires a lot of detail work, so set aside a day to complete it. (Keep in mind that aluminum and plastic frames don’t need to be painted.)
Carpet tends to be underfoot and out of mind. But when it’s time to choose a new one, all thoughts turn to the floor. Here are pros and cons of common carpet styles and fibers as well as a translation of some showroom lingo.

The carpets discussed here can be installed wall to wall, or ordered in a specific size with bound edges to be used as an area rug—a good solution for large or odd-shaped rooms. (Specialty area rugs, such as Orientals, have their own considerations and are not included here.)

One of the first choices to make is between tufted and woven construction. Most carpets are tufted, consisting of rows of machine-punched yarns held together by adhesive and a backing. They generally last between five and seven years. Woven carpets, made on a loom, are known for their long life span—20 to 30 years. You’ll pay significantly more for the higher quality. Most of the styles and fibers shown on the following pages are used for both woven and tufted carpet. So start looking—and you’re on your way to kicking off your shoes.
CARPET STYLES

**SISAL-LIKE** carpets are meant to imitate the look of sisal or other plant fibers and are made from wool or a synthetic. **WHAT TO KNOW:** These mimics are softer underfoot than the real thing, and they release stains better. However, many people prefer the appearance of real sisal.

**WILTON** is considered the premier woven carpet. It is made on a jacquard loom and can have cut, loop, or cut-and-loop pile. **WHAT TO KNOW:** These carpets are tightly constructed, making them dense and durable. Worsted-wool Wiltons are some of the best carpets available.

**SAXONY** carpet yarns have a soft twist or curl; the pile is often cut at an angle. **WHAT TO KNOW:** Saxony is not quite as textured as frieze but it still effectively conceals marks, making the carpet a popular choice for children’s rooms and family rooms.

**VELVET** carpet is soft, like the fabric for which it’s named. The pile is short, uniform, and dense. **WHAT TO KNOW:** The carpet has a matte finish, giving it an understated appeal. Velvet pile generally holds up well but, like plush, its uniform surface exposes indentations and tracks.

**FRIEZE** is a cut-pile carpet with twisted yarns and a crimped, textured appearance. **WHAT TO KNOW:** The twisted strands of a frieze carpet obscure footprints and vacuum marks well, and the tousled look complements an informal room.

**SHAG** has pile so long it doesn’t stand upright, giving a carpet a “shaggy” look. **WHAT TO KNOW:** No longer just a throwback to the 1960s and ’70s, today’s shags come in contemporary colors and have an inviting feel. But those long yarns can still get caught in the rotating head of a vacuum.

**AXMINSTER** is a cut-pile carpet that is woven by definition. It is often called “pub carpet,” a reference to the carpet’s frequent appearance in restaurants and hotels. **WHAT TO KNOW:** Axminster tends to be the most affordable of the woven carpets and is available in a wide range of colors. Like a Wilton, it is long-wearing. But it is not as refined and may appear industrial.

**PLUSH** pile is cut to a smooth, level height. It is higher and less dense than velvet. **WHAT TO KNOW:** Plush carpet is comfortable underfoot, making it a cozy covering for a bedroom floor. But its pile is easily crushed, revealing indentations.

How a carpet’s pile is cut and shaped contributes to its look and feel—short or shaggy, soft or nubby—and to how well the product wears.
A carpet’s appearance, texture, and longevity also are determined by its fibers. The pile can be natural, synthetic, or a blend of several fibers.

**Wool** is strong, static-resistant, and pleasing to the touch. **What to Know:** It is the fiber that most synthetic fibers are meant to imitate, and it is more costly than those materials. Wool is resilient and also naturally stain-resistant and flame-retardant. Note that a wool carpet will shed a bit initially.

**Silk** carpet is largely produced in India, China, and Turkey. **What to Know:** Carpets made from silk are soft and luxurious. Silk dyes better and is more durable than any other fiber. Because of silk’s high cost, the fiber is often blended with wool.

**Cotton** carpeting was popular in the United States before World War II. Today, it’s made almost exclusively in Belgium. **What to Know:** Cotton carpet, like cotton clothing, wears well and has a natural feel. A magnet for dust and dirt, it should not be used in high-traffic areas.

**Linen** yarn is made from flax. Most linen carpeting is produced in France and Belgium (the latter is generally considered the better quality). **What to Know:** Linen carpet is lustrous and can help absorb humidity. However, it can be quite costly, and with age, linen carpet will reveal traffic patterns.

**Sisal** comes from the agave plant; the highest-quality fibers are from East Africa. **What to Know:** Sisal is strong (second only to wool). It is one of the more pricey plant fibers. Sisal is particularly prone to fading in direct sunlight and can be stained even by water.

**Jute** flooring is made from the jute plant, which also is used to make burlap and twine. **What to Know:** Jute is softer than sisal but also less durable. Like sisal, it can be damaged easily by sunlight and liquids.

**Coir** is the fiber taken from the hairy husk of coconuts. **What to Know:** Coir is durable, wiry, and mildew-resistant. In other words, coir makes the perfect doormat.

**Sea Grass** carpet is made from a variety of reedy plants and has a greenish tint. **What to Know:** Although durable, sea grass carpets are not very absorbent; they should not be used in moist or humid rooms. Sea grass costs less than sisal and jute.

**Paper** carpet is made from paper cords coated in a protective wax. **What to Know:** Paper carpet is, in fact, quite strong. It is more water-resistant than carpets made from other plant fibers, but liquid spills should still be blotted immediately.

**Polyester** has a wool-like appearance and is often used for cut-pile carpets. It dyes well, so it’s available in a range of vibrant colors. **What to Know:** Polyester carpet is soft, stain-resistant, and affordable. It’s not as resilient as other carpet fibers, and may mat down in a short period.

**Olefin** is a glossy synthetic fiber usually sold in muted colors. **What to Know:** Olefin is one of the less expensive synthetics. Water- and stain-resistant, it’s often used outdoors. However, the fiber crushes easily.

**Nylon** is the most popular carpet fiber in the United States. **What to Know:** Nylon is durable, resilient, and stain-resistant. It is one of the more expensive synthetic fibers. The fiber comes in many hues; look for solution-dyed nylon, which is colorfast.
HOW TO CHOOSE CARPET

THE NEXT STEPS

As you shop, take the opportunity to ask questions, read labels, and find out how to install and maintain the carpet you buy.

PRICE AND PARTICULARS

Bear in mind that carpet is often priced per square yard, not square foot. (To calculate the price per square foot yourself, divide the price per yard by nine.) Be aware, too, that when you look at a carpet sample, the color might differ slightly from what would be delivered to your home. Consider asking for a roll-cut sample—a piece of carpet cut from the lot that you would actually purchase. This is particularly helpful when it comes to fibers with a tendency to fade, such as sisal or jute.

PADDING

The pressure a carpet withstands results in crushed pile and ground-in dirt. Some of that can be alleviated by padding, which also helps to absorb sound. Not all paddings are suitable for all carpets, so ask before you buy. For instance, "hard" carpet, including those made from most plant fibers, can be damaged by ultracushiony padding (the space it creates invites shoe heels to puncture the carpet).

INSTALLATION

"Installing" an area rug is easy—just be sure to lay down the proper padding first. But wall-to-wall can be quite tricky. To make certain that carpet stays put and that seams are inconspicuous, leave the job to professionals. For large rooms, ask your retailer if the carpet you’re buying will “seam well.” No seam is invisible, but some carpets disguise them better than others.

MAINTENANCE

Before cleaning, check the manufacturer’s instructions. Cleaning methods for carpet vary by fiber, but a weekly once-over using a vacuum with good suction and a rotating head keeps many carpets looking their best. (For delicate carpets, such as hand-woven or hand-tufted, use a vacuum without a rotating head.) A professional can steam-clean synthetic and wool carpet, if needed.

DIVE IN TO THE PILE

Seeing and touching carpet samples will drive home their differences—and your preferences. A cross-section of pile heights (left) includes short velvet piles (top two) and longer pluses (bottom three); deeper pile has a more luxurious feel, but short pile tends to be easier to care for. A carpet label (right) is required by law to list fiber content and country of origin; some will include additional helpful details.
**ARRANGING PICTURES**

How do you plan a display of framed pictures without leaving a wall full of unsightly nail holes? The foolproof method is to use low-tack drafting tape to hang templates of the pictures so you can move them around until you find a pleasing arrangement. First, trace the picture frames on kraft paper, and cut out the templates. Pull the hanging wire on the back of each frame taut, and measure from the top of the wire’s arc to the top of the frame. On the matching template, measure in from the top edge this same distance to mark where the picture hook will meet the wire. Lay the picture hook itself on the template so that the bottom of the hook is on the mark; make another mark where the nail hole will go. Use drafting tape to hang the templates on the wall. When you’re satisfied with the placement of each template, hammer the nails through the picture hooks into the wall, right over the marks in the kraft paper. Rip the paper off, leaving the nails and hooks in place, and hang your perfectly arranged pictures.

**WIRE PLATE HANGERS**

If you’re displaying your favorite plates on the wall, make sure the hangers that support them don’t detract from their beauty. Unlike many store-bought hangers, the ones shown here can be made to accommodate any size or shape you want to display. Start with annealed iron wire (we used 18-gauge). This wire is particularly soft and pliable and can easily be manipulated to fit around any plate. Using wire cutters, cut two pieces of wire three inches longer than the diameter of your plate (the plate shown here is 6 1/4 inches). Bend one piece into a “V” shape. Twist second wire to make a loop in the center; this loop will be used to attach hanger to wall hook. Feed one end of the “V”-shaped wire through the loop. The “V” should be upside-down and rest on the bottom of the loop. Twist the “V” wire around itself once to secure. Position the wires on plate so the top of loop hits edge of plate’s base. Holding wires in position, wrap them tightly around the rim to front of plate. Clip the ends of the wire to a uniform length. Using small needle-nose pliers, twist ends around to form decorative loop. For very large or heavy plates, additional wires may be necessary for extra support.
FLORAL PRINT DRAWER LINERS
The dark, dignified exterior of this antique table opens to reveal a sprightly color and pattern. Italian floral-print paper lines both the drawer and two removable balsa trays. Cut the paper of your choice to fit the drawer bottom, and lay it down without adhesive to avoid marring the original wood finish. Inside the balsa trays, double-sided tape may be used to hold the paper firmly in place.

CAFÉ CURTAIN
Love the look of a valance but want more privacy? Hang a short curtain on the lower half of the window, so the bottom edge just brushes the sill. A bonus: Lots of light will stream in through the window above.

HOW-TO
The tailored look of men’s handkerchiefs can add punch to more than just pockets. Turn a set of new hankies or pristine vintage ones into a valance. With the zigzag stitch, sew handkerchiefs into two strips of seven; place strips side by side along long edges, and sew together. (The valance should be 50 percent wider than the window, so add or subtract hankies accordingly.) Fold resulting rectangle in half lengthwise; stitch horizontally 1 inch down from fold for a curtain-rod channel.