

There's a Right Way to Buy Exterior House Paint ...and this is the season for it



Exterior house paint has undergone some changes in recent years. Designers now have their own brands. And on a technical front, water-based paint now outstrips oil-based paint in quality and durability.

You have six decisions to make—stain versus paint...oil versus latex...type of latex...type of finish...quality level...and brand-name versus generic

STAIN

The first question is whether to use paint or a thinner, solid-color stain.

If you like to change house colors frequently, choose a stain. You can reapply

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it often without creating the buildup that multiple coats of paint create.

Primer creates a smooth surface for the paint to adhere to. There are “self-primed” stains on the market...but with some wood types they may cause bleeding or discoloration.

Trap: Most stain lasts about five years. Paint can last 20.

OIL VERSUS LATEX PAINT

Whatever kind of paint—or stain—you buy, you’ll have to choose between oil paint, which is solvent-based, or latex, which is water-based.

Until recently, oil paint was more popular for exterior painting because of its durable hard-shell finish. However, because of steady improvements in the quality of latex paint, many experts now favor latex over oil for most situations.

Examples: Until recently, latex paint could not be used when the temperature

fell below 50 degrees. Oil paint is good to 40 degrees. But some new latex paints are good to 35 degrees.

Also, latex is better for most surfaces that get wet—such as siding—since it allows more moisture to escape when the sun comes out. That’s also why latex is not as apt as oil to develop mildew problems.

Note: With latex, you must pretreat the surface with a water-repellent preservative.

Latex paint looks just as good as oil paint, and it is much more flexible than oil...so it’s less likely to chip and crack.

Oil is still preferable for places that get heavy traffic, such as porches...or for wood columns. However, the columns must be well ventilated, or the paint may crack

If you choose latex, you have to decide between vinyl-acrylic or 100% acrylic.

Vinyl-acrylic paint usually costs less, but 100% acrylic latex paint is more durable because it’s made with better resin.

Finally, whether you choose oil or latex, you’ll have to pick the finish—glossy, semigloss or flat.

The glossier a finish, the more stain-resistant and washable it is. Flat paint hides imperfections, and it achieves a “selfcleaning” effect as the surface erodes, taking dirt with it

BEST VALUE

Most brands divide their paint into different quality levels, from low to high grade. Others classify paint by how long it is guaranteed to last

The better paints have better resin, and more of it. Quality paints also use better pigments, made out of such chemicals as titanium dioxide. Cheaper paints use claylike fillers.

The difference? Good paint holds up longer, doesn’t fade as quickly

Moneysworth interviewed Mark Knaebe, surface chemist with Forest Products Laboratory, USDA Forest Service, Madison, Wisconsin.

He is coauthor of *Finishes for Exterior Wood: Selection, Application and Maintenance*, Forest Products Society/ \$19.95.

