

# Helpful tips for reducing leftover paint



Before you start on your next painting project, plan to avoid creating leftover paint. If you do have leftover paint, dispose of it properly. Properly managing paint can be simple. See the suggestions below on how to reduce leftover paint and how to properly discard unusable paint.

**1. Buy only what you need.** When preparing to paint, buy just the amount you need to do the job. When you avoid buying too much at the start there is less chance that leftovers land in the trash later. (TIP: To determine the number of gallons of paint needed for one coat, measure the total square footage of the surfaces to be painted and divide by 400. Also, the label on paint cans will tell you the square foot coverage of the can's contents. Consider how many coats you will need, too.)

**2. Keep paint fresh for years.** Store paint so it lasts for years. Cover the opening with plastic wrap, and make sure the lid fits securely over the plastic so the paint doesn't leak. Then store the paint can upside down! This creates a tight seal, and keeps the paint fresh to use again.

**3. Use all your leftover paint.** It's great for touch-up jobs and smaller projects. You also can blend and mix smaller quantities of similar colors of latex paint to use as a base coat.

**4. Give it away to someone else to use it.** If you can't use your leftover paint, donate it or exchange it. Community groups, theater groups, schools and churches are just a few of the organizations that can use your leftover paint. Ask friends, neighbors, and family members if they can use up your leftover paint. Full, unused paint can be donated to Habitat for Humanity. Their information can be found at [www.habitatstl.org](http://www.habitatstl.org).

**5. As a last resort, dispose of unwanted/usable paint properly.** If you do need to dispose of unwanted paint, then do it safely. Latex paint that

has been subjected to freeze-thaw (will look like cottage cheese or curdled milk) cannot be used or recycled. Paints that have hardened can be disposed of in the regular trash.

- Latex paint can be recycled at Earthbound Recycling in Eureka, MO. For details on fees and hours, visit their website at [www.EarthboundRecycling.com](http://www.EarthboundRecycling.com).
- Solidify latex paint by mixing with an absorbent, like oil dry or traditional—non-clumping—cat litter and leaving the lid off so it can dry.\* Then throw dried paint away with your regular trash.
- Liquid oil-based paint should not be tossed out in the trash or poured down the drain. Hold onto leftover oil-based paint for disposal at the [Permanent HHW Program](#). Note: When hardened, latex paint can be safely discarded in the trash. A better alternative is to keep this valuable resource out of the landfill by recycling it. The new [Permanent HHW Program](#) will continue to accept latex paint for recycling, but residents will pay a fee for that service.

## \*Extended directions for drying out paint:

- Mix latex paint with an equal amount of absorbent.
- Stir in completely and let the paint dry. It takes about 10 minutes for the absorbent material to harden.
- Add more absorbent if the paint is soft or runny after 10 minutes. Repeat until the material is very thick.
- Oil dry, sawdust, dirt, traditional cat litter, or shredded paper can be used as an absorbent.
- If there is not enough room in the paint can to stir in enough cat litter to dry it all out, pour off paint into any plastic or cardboard container that is large enough to hold the material, including a yogurt container, plastic tub, shoebox, or other convenient container.

*Article includes information from the National Paint & Coatings Association and the King County website.*