

Environmentally Friendly Paint Options

A fresh coat of paint can really brighten or change a room! It's fun to pick out a paint and plan to update, change or clean up a look. When looking for the right paint, the number of options at the hardware store can be overwhelming. If what you're looking for is simply the right color, it shouldn't be too hard to find. But if you also would like to find a durable paint that will not harm the environment or be hazardous for your family's health, a little more research might be warranted. Before bringing paint home, it would be wise to find out what goes into making it and learn what ingredients could be potentially harmful.

Volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, are released in great quantities when paint is applied. They can continue to leach airborne chemicals for years, even when the paint is peeling off the walls. VOCs are a major polluter of indoor air and could be carcinogenic.

To avoid bringing harmful chemicals into your home, you need to look for natural paints composed of oils, waxes, and plant-based dyes which are virtually heavy metal and VOC free. You can find natural paints in all varieties, as primers, finishes, sealers, stains, or waxes, but they can be costly choices. Options can include lime washes, casein or milk paint, or clay paint. Natural paint products will work well indoors, but are not suitable for exterior projects because they can be damaged by outdoor elements. Lower VOC paints, many of which are lime based, can be a better option for outdoor use.

Clay paints, made from minerals, can give an earthy look. Lime washes, made like traditional whitewash, are fine for outdoor use with regular reapplication. Gloves and goggles need to be worn when applying lime due to the corrosive properties before it has cured. Casein paint is derived from cow's milk protein and comes in powder form. This product provides a durable, even tough indoor finish, but has to be applied quickly after mixing.

If your impression of natural paint is unfavorable because of products that have been available in the past, it might be time to try again. Older eco-friendly paints tended to fade and didn't rate high for durability. But newer natural paints are used for historical conservation and restoration, and meet high standards due to tighter regulations and consumer demand. Newer low VOC emitting paints are water instead of solvent based, allowing for less than 50% of the VOC content of traditional paint, or 200 or fewer grams per liter.

For paint that is even more environmentally friendly, look for the Green Seal. These paints are costlier, but have 50 grams of VOCs or less per liter, and may even have less than 5 grams per liter. Try to avoid paints with formaldehyde, ammonia, or acetone. Though they aren't petroleum derived, they can be a safety hazard. And though they might sound appealing, stay away from anti-mildew or antifungal paints. They can leach off toxic gases for years.

Natural or low VOC paints can be invaluable to your next home project. Remember to shop carefully. Non toxic paints are available with the right know-how and research. The result will be complimentary to a green lifestyle and ensure healthier indoor air.