



# how to paint FURNITURE

get the perfect finish  
every time



# How to Paint Furniture

Painting furniture is one of the best ways to give an old piece of furniture new life. But honestly, there is so much information out there about how to paint furniture, it can be really hard to know where to start.

This guide will walk you step by step through the furniture painting process from start to finish and explain what you need to know to get a gorgeous finish on every piece of furniture you paint.

Are you ready to learn how to paint furniture and get a beautiful finish every time? Let's get started!

## making a plan

Before you do anything else, start with a bit of planning. What do you want your finished piece to look like? Are you going for a rustic distressed finish or clean and smooth? What colors are you considering using? Will your piece get a lot of daily use or will it be more of a display piece?

When you have a good idea of how you want your finished piece to look, it will make every decision along the way so much easier from whether or not you need primer to which paint to use.

# prepping furniture for paint

There are quite a few brands of furniture paint out there that say they don't require any prep. That sounds amazing because who doesn't want to skip the boring stuff and get started painting right away?

It can be so tempting to skip the prep and jump right into painting but don't do it! You are just asking for trouble if you skip straight to paint.

Even though lots of paint can technically be slapped straight onto furniture, you aren't going to get a beautiful, lasting finish that way. And if it isn't going to look beautiful, what's the point of even doing it in the first place?

## Cleaning

The very first thing you need to do before you paint any piece of furniture is do a thorough cleaning. No matter what type of paint you are using, it isn't going to stick to grease, dust or other dirt.

I have used Krud Kutter Prepaint Cleaner to clean furniture with great results. Another option is to simply use warm water and Dawn dish soap. Dawn is cheap, I already have it on hand, and it is awesome at removing grease and dust.



## Repairing

Once your furniture is clean and dry, it's time to do a thorough assessment. If anything is loose or needs to be repaired, this is the time to do it.

Fill in any holes and deep scratches with wood filler.

Remove any hardware that you don't want painted as well. If you are planning to replace the drawer pulls or knobs, check to see if you will need to change the placement of the screw holes. If so, go ahead and fill in the old holes with wood filler and sand smooth.



## Sanding

Most of the time you don't have to sand your furniture before painting it. When you are re-staining a piece of furniture, you have to completely remove the old finish first, but not for painting. I'd say this is one of the major reasons painting furniture has become so popular lately – it is a much easier way to bring old furniture back to life!

Even though you don't need to remove the old finish, you do need to make sure you have a good surface for your paint to stick to.

If your furniture has any really rough spots, sand them smooth. (A general rule when sanding to a smooth finish is to sand with 100 grit sandpaper, followed by 150, and finish off with 220).

Also, if your furniture has a shiny, glossy finish, you will need to start by sanding it to rough it up a bit. It is very hard for paint to stick to a slick, shiny surface. Roughing up your furniture with 220 grit sandpaper will give the paint something to stick to.

After sanding always be sure to remove any dust using a damp cloth or tack cloth.

If there are any sections of your furniture that you don't want painted including hardware that cannot be removed, use painter's tape to protect these.



# primer

Lots of furniture paints also say that you can skip the primer. This one is actually true...but there are some important exceptions.

If you are painting a piece of wood furniture with a very dark or reddish colored wood, you should really start with a good oil-based primer. Wood furniture has tannins which are natural oils within the wood. When you paint wood furniture, the moisture in the paint can cause the wood grain to open and release the tannins.

This is particularly true of certain types of wood that are especially popular for making furniture including mahogany, cherry, and knotty pine. When you paint furniture white or another light color, these tannins will cause your beautiful paint finish to look yellow and splotchy. Not what you want!

You can prevent this whole bleed-through issue by sealing dark or reddish furniture first using either Zinsser Bullseye Shellac or Zinsser Cover Stain Oil-Based Primer. Either of these products will create a barrier that prevents the tannins from bleeding through and yellowing your paint.

It is also a good idea to start with primer if you are painting anything made of raw, unfinished wood. Any primer will work in this case. Latex primer is a good choice because it is easy to clean up using just water, but oil based is also fine. (And in case you are wondering, no, the paint with primer already added that you can buy at Lowe's or Home Depot doesn't count as a primer when it comes to painting furniture.)

Also, any time you are painting something white, it is a good idea to start with primer. White paint has very little pigment compared to other colors and usually requires a lot of coats to get good coverage. Starting with a coat of white primer can really cut down on how much paint you will need. This can be a big time and money saver since paint is typically much more expensive than primer.



## paint

Finally, you get to start painting! This is the fun part.

It is easiest to paint large, flat surfaces like table tops and sides of dressers with a small foam roller. Then you can use a paintbrush for smaller or more detailed sections.

It is important to use a good quality paint brush for painting furniture if you want a smooth finish. Most specialty furniture paint lines also carry a line of brushes that will work. If you want to start out with a less expensive option, I like the Purdy 1.5 inch angled brush. When painting furniture be sure to use long, even brushstrokes to get a nice smooth finish.

You will most likely need two coats of paint, but sometimes you may need more coats, especially if you are using a very light paint like white or a very saturated color like red or black. Be sure to let the paint dry thoroughly between coats.



## Distressing

Whether or not you want to distress your paint finish is totally up to you. If you do decide to do some distressing, it will look most natural if you sand the paint by hand rather than using a power sander.

Start with 220 grit sandpaper and lightly sand your painted piece along the edges. If this isn't strong enough to take off the paint, try 150 grit. Focus on sanding along the edges and corners of the piece, on any raised details, and along any drawer edges.

If you want a rougher look, you can also very lightly distress along the flat planes of the furniture but proceed with caution. The goal is for the furniture to look as if it has aged and been worn down with time and use, not as if someone has sanded the heck out of it.

That said, there really isn't a right or wrong amount of distressing. Do what you think looks good. If you end up wishing you hadn't sanded quite so much, it is easy enough to repaint those areas.



# sealer

Finally, you need to finish your furniture by adding a sealer.

There are a few types of furniture paint that do not require a sealer or topcoat: DecoArt Satin Enamels, General Finishes Milk Paint, and Fusion Mineral Paint to name a few. I have used each of these paints without a top coat with good results.

However, if you are planning to skip the sealer, there are a few things you need to keep in mind.

First, it is important that you are very gentle with your furniture for the first few weeks after painting. All paint takes between a few days and a few weeks to fully cure or harden. During this initial period, it is very easy for furniture to get dents and chips.

Even beyond the first month, if your furniture is going to get heavy use, it is a good idea to use a quality topcoat. It's much better to take a few extra hours now to protect your paint finish than to have to repaint the entire thing because the finish got ruined.

If you do choose to use a topcoat, it is important to use something that is non-yellowing. Also think about what kind of sheen you want your furniture to have. If you are painting something rustic or distressed, a matte finish is going to look best. If you want a more modern, clean look, you can choose between satin, semi-gloss, or glossy. Just remember that semi-gloss and glossy finishes can be quite shiny and also tend to highlight imperfections.

There are a variety of good sealers available. You can find Minwax Polycrylic at most home improvement stores and it does work, but it can be tricky to get a smooth finish with. My two favorite sealers are General Finishes High Performance Top Coat in Satin and General Finishes Flat out Flat Top Coat. Both are easy to apply, go on smoothly, and provide a durable finish.

Almost all chalk paints do need to be sealed with a good top coat. Some people love to use wax as a sealer on their chalk-painted furniture, but any good sealer (included those listed above) will work. Personally, I find wax to be difficult to apply well. I also don't like that it has to be reapplied regularly unlike other sealers.

Whichever topcoat you choose to use, be sure to follow the directions on the can. Some brands go on best with a brush, some with a sponge brush, and some with a rag.

Once your sealer is dry, be extra gentle with your furniture for the first few days.



And now you know how to paint furniture like a pro. Not only that, but you can be confident your painted furniture will turn out beautifully and last for years.