

Cleaning Paint Brushes

After I graduated from college and started working, one of my first jobs was as a school teacher and like many teachers I needed a summer job to make ends meet, a friend of mine (who name happens to be a Matt as well) was a professional painter and he gave me a job of being one of his helpers, my first day on the job he gave me a set of paint brushes and told me to take care of them because they were in his words, money makers. To this day I treat all of my tools with that thought in mind, they are my money makers.

Believe it or not, I still have one of the brushes that he gave me on that day almost 25 years ago, being a professional painter (I started my on business when Matt became a Priest) I made a lot of money with that one brush.

To me paintbrushes are valuable tools and taking care of them is just as natural as putting gas in my car. With proper care, paint brushes can last a long time. With today's economy being the way that it is, I can't imagine not taking care of something that first, is not inexpensive, but also can have a life time of use. Not to mention, the green aspect, of using something until it just plain wears out, we are so quick to throw something away because we don't want to take the time to maintain it. Those days are gone, and replaced

with the future of maintaining what we have and not wasting resources.

Hear! Hear!

Good paintbrushes can be expensive, but they're worth it. I recommend buying great brushes and treating them right. The following steps will help you keep your brushes like new and give you years of painting service.

Brush maintenance starts while painting: Always use a plastic paint pail pouring only about 1- 2 inches of paint into the pail, so that the brush can be set in the paint (for short periods) when taking a short break, this will keep the brush bristle moist.



I use a pail made by Wooster Brush called a Pelican Pail that holds the brush upright with a small magnet that the brush handle will grab onto, pretty slick. Setting the brush on top of the paint pail will dry it out and make it harder to clean when the job is finished.

By pouring into the pail only a couple of inches of paint, only the tip of the brush will rest in the paint. This will allow the bristles to remain moist but not cover the entire brush with paint.



When painting try to keep only the tips of the brush wet with paint, by using the tapping method of loading your brush with paint. Dip the brush into paint, and then gently tap the side of the pail to remove the excess paint. Do this instead of dragging the brush across the lip of the pail. By tapping the brush, you are not dragging paint further up into the bristles while at the same time, loading the brush with enough paint to do the job. The more area of the brush that has paint in it, the more too clean.

If you are taking a short break, place the tips of the brush in paint and cover the pail with a damp cloth. However, remember not to leave the brush in the pail overnight. As soon as you are finished painting, clean the brush, the practice of storing the brush in the refrigerator is something that folks do, however try to do this only in a situation where you just can't clean the brush until the next day.

*I do use this method for staining brushes, when using an oil based products, it saves me from using paint thinner to clean my brushes daily. I generally try to use foam brushes when staining and using polyurethanes. Foam brushes are very inexpensive and seem to hold up well using the frig method. I have several in my garage frig now, that I use over and over again, I mark the brush with the stain color and just reuse.

When you are done painting, always try to remove as much of the paint from the brush as possible before cleaning it. Gently scrape the brush over the edge of the pail, however, try not to pull paint into the bristles that don't have paint on them already.

In an effort to waste as little water as possible, clean the brush in the same pail you worked with, obviously you have poured all the paint in the pail back into the paint can and sealed the can properly (see storing paint)



1 Fill the pail with a few inches of water.

2 Using a wire brush, scrap the bristle gently to remove any paint that may have dried and hardened. Scrap the brush in the directions of the bristles, working from the handle down.



* (By the way, the technical term for metal part that holds the bristles of the brush is the ferrule)



3 Start working the brush into the water and wring it in your hand.

4 Work the water up into the handle by gently squeezing the water through the bristles.





5 Do this several times, then change the water and repeat until the water runs clear.



6 Once you have finished cleaning, dry the brush by spinning it in the pail, place it between the palms of your hand and spin it to remove the water. Removing the water not only allows the bristles to dry faster, it will make the handle and the glue that holds the bristles last much longer. If you are working with a fairly large brush like an exterior brush, remove the water by tapping the brush against the toe of your boots. Never try this with sandals.





7 Next, store your brushes in the packages that they came in. Storing them in their original packages will help retain their shape and protect them when they are in your toolbox.

If you have already thrown the original packages away, you can wrap the brush in a rolled-up newspaper, but always cover them in some way.

I know this may seem like a lot of work, but it really isn't that bad and when you think about the purchase price of a really good brush, it is worth the effort. After all brushes are money makers or money breakers...it's up to you.

Just a side note, if you are ever working with Shari or your significant other; make sure that you have done a few sample boards of paint colors with a foam brush. That way, although they often change their minds, you won't have to repeat the whole cleaning process when they do!

Matt



© 2009. mattandshari.com, all rights reserved.