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How to Spray Paint Kitchen Cabinets

All it takes is two coats of paint!



Next Project

Instead of replacing your old kitchen cabinets, make them new by repainting them. With an inexpensive paint sprayer and a few gallons of paint you can transform your kitchen in a weekend.

By the DIY experts of The Family Handyman Magazine

TIME

⌚ Multi-day

COMPLEXITY

🔧 Moderate

COST

💰 \$100 – \$500

Overview



New-looking cabinets in 3 steps

Clean the old paint cabinets thoroughly, prime with a stain-blocking primer, and then paint with a high-quality latex enamel.

You don't need to spend thousands of dollars on new cabinets to give your kitchen a stunning new look. If your cabinets are in good

shape, you can give them a fresh face with paint. Everything you need to give your drab cabinets a silky smooth painted finish costs less than \$250—including the sprayer.

Professional painters typically spray-paint doors because it produces an ultra-smooth finish. In this article, we'll show you how to spray-paint your doors and drawers. There's just a short learning curve to use the sprayer effectively. You could also spray the paint cabinet frames, sides and trim, but masking off the cabinet openings (and the rest of the kitchen) takes a lot of time, so just use a brush for those areas.

Despite our enthusiasm, there are downsides to a painted finish. The paint isn't as tough as a factory finish, and even if you're careful, you can still end up with paint runs and have brush marks on your paint cabinet sides.

All the materials you need to paint your cabinets are available at home centers and paint stores. Plan to spend four or five days to complete the job—you'll have to let the paint dry overnight between coats, and you can only paint one side of the doors per day.

Is painting right for you?

Not all cabinets are worth painting. They must be structurally sound—paint obviously isn't a cure for doors that are falling apart or don't close properly. If your cabinets are oak or some other species with coarse grain and you want a smooth finish, you'll have to fill the grain on the door panels, cabinet frames and cabinet sides with spackling compound. That nearly doubles the length of this project because sanding the compound takes a long, long time (but if you don't mind a coarse finish, you can skip this step).

If you like the style of your cabinets and they're in good shape, and you're willing to invest the time to paint them, this project is for you.

Wash, rinse, tape, repeat



Photo 2: Protect adjoining surfaces

Tape off the walls, ceiling and flooring, and cover the countertops with rosin paper. Wrap appliances and the vent hood with plastic sheeting or masking paper.

As with any successful painting project, preparation is the key—and the most time-consuming step. Start by removing the cabinet doors and drawers as well as all the hardware. Label the doors as you remove them so you'll know where to reinstall them. Writing

a number in the hinge hole (for Euro hinges) or where the hinge attaches works great—it's the only part that's not painted.

Take the doors and drawers to the garage or another work area and spread them out on a work surface. It's surprising how much space doors and drawers eat up—even if you have a small kitchen. An extension ladder placed over sawhorses gives you a surface to set the doors on. Wash the front and the back of the doors and the drawer fronts to remove grease (Photo 1). Then stick tape in the hinge holes or where the hinges attach to keep out the paint.

Wash the grease off the cabinet frames in the kitchen, too. Then tape off everything that abuts the cabinet frames (Photo 2). Use 1-mil plastic sheeting or brown masking paper to cover appliances. Use rosin paper for countertops—it's thick enough to resist tears and won't let small paint spills seep through.

Give cabinets a fresh start with primer



Photo 3: Repair problem spots

Fix scratches, holes and dings with spackling compound. Work the compound into the damaged area with a putty knife. Fill in holes from handles and hardware if you're replacing the hardware and need holes in different places.

Some paint cabinets, like ours, have a catalyzed lacquer finish that's very hard. Primer won't form a good bond to this surface unless you scuff it up first. First sand any damaged areas on the doors or paint cabinet frames with 320-grit sandpaper to remove burrs or ridges, then fill the areas with spackling compound (Photo 3).

Lightly sand the doors and cabinet frames, trim and sides with 320-grit sandpaper. Sand just enough to take off the shine—you don't need to sand off the finish. Vacuum the dust off the wood using a bristle attachment. Right before you're ready to apply the primer, wipe down the doors and frames with a tack cloth. Running the cloth over the surface is enough—you don't need to scrub to remove the fine dust particles.

Apply a stain-killing primer (Bulls Eye 1-2-3 and BIN are two brands) with a paintbrush (Photo 4). You can use a cheap brush—even a disposable one—for this. Don't worry about brushstrokes in the primer (you'll remove them later with sandpaper) or getting a uniform finish. The doors and frames don't have to look pretty at this stage. But don't use a roller. It leaves a texture that will affect the finish. Besides, brushing is almost as fast as rolling, and you can use the bristles to work the primer into crevices.

Once the primer is dry (just one or two hours), lightly sand the doors and cabinets with 320-grit sandpaper to remove any brushstrokes (Photo 5). Sandpaper works better than a sanding sponge—you can feel the rough spots through the paper, and paper doesn't round over corners like sponges do.

If you have doors with coarse wood grain (like oak) and want a smooth finish, fill in the grain with spackling compound. Use a putty knife to skim-coat the door with compound, working it into the wood grain. Wait for it to dry, sand it with medium-grit sandpaper, then prime it again.

Immaculate Finish in 90 Minutes

For this project, we used a Wagner Control Spray Double Duty spray gun available through our affiliation with [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). The high-volume, low-pressure (HVLP) sprayer gives the doors a thin, even coat of paint and makes quick work of painting. We sprayed our 18 doors and four drawers in less than 90 minutes per coat. The sprayer occasionally "spits" paint, but the Floetrol that you mix in levels out the finish. You can clean the sprayer in about 10 minutes.

The paint experts we talked to say you can get a nice-looking finish with non-HVLP sprayers too. But the advantages of an HVLP sprayer are that the low pressure produces little overspray, so most of your paint ends up where you want it—on the doors—and the spray is easy to control.

Complete the transformation with paint



Photo 10: Paint drawers

Paint the drawers with the sprayer after wrapping the inside with plastic or paper. Paint the backs first, then the edges and then the faces, starting at the top and working down. Start and stop the spray past the sides of the drawer.

Use a gloss or semigloss latex enamel paint for your paint cabinets. Its hard, shiny finish resists stains and fingerprints.

To get started, pour a gallon of the paint into a bucket and thin it with half a cup of water and half a quart of Floetrol paint additive (available at paint dealers). The water and the Floetrol level out the paint when it's applied and slow the drying process, which helps eliminate brush and lap marks. The thinner paint also provides a more even coat when you're spraying.

Paint the cabinets with a brush (Photo 6). Paint an entire rail, stile or trim piece before the paint dries, then move on to the next part of the cabinet. Paint any exposed sides of cabinets with a brush. Most light brush marks will disappear as the paint dries (thanks to the Floetrol).

Before spray painting, construct a makeshift booth to contain the airborne spray. Assemble a work surface (putting boards over sawhorses works great), then hang plastic sheeting around the work area. Make sure to ventilate the room— even if it's just a fan blowing out an open window.

Fill the spray container with the paint mixed with Floetrol and water. Wear a mask respirator when spray painting. Test the spray pattern on cardboard, keeping the nozzle 10 to 12 in. from the surface (Photo 7). Sweep your entire arm back and forth across the door panel; don't just use your wrist. Practice spraying on the cardboard to get a feel for the sprayer. When you're ready to paint, set a block of wood or a cardboard box on the work surface to elevate the doors. Place a lazy Susan turntable (sold at discount stores) over the box, then set the door on top of it (Photo 8).

Spray the back of the doors first. This lets you get used to spraying before you paint the front. Start by spraying the edges. Rotate the door on the turntable to paint each edge so you won't have to change your body position. Move your arm across the entire edge of the door, starting the spray before the paint lands on the door, and keep spraying past the end. Keep the nozzle 10 to 12 in. from the door. After painting all four edges, start at the top of the door and spray in a sweeping motion back and forth, moving down just enough each time to overlap the previous pass by 50 percent until you reach the door bottom.

Let the paint dry overnight. Then give the paint cabinet frames, sides and trim a second coat. Spray a first coat on the door fronts (Photo 9).

Cover the drawers with masking paper or plastic sheeting so only the paintable surface is visible. Set the drawer face down on the turntable and spray the back. Then place the drawer on its bottom and spray the front (Photo 10). Be careful not to overspray the drawer. It's easy to get runs in the paint on drawer fronts. Don't worry about areas that are lightly covered. You'll give everything a second coat.

If you catch paint runs while they're still wet, gently brush them out with a paintbrush (Photo 11).

Let the doors and drawers dry overnight, then give them a second coat. It's up to you if you want to give the back of the doors two coats. We gave ours just one.

When the doors are dry, install the hardware and hang the doors (Photo 12). If any paint seeped into the hinge holes, scrape it out so the hinges will fit snugly.

Figure A: Painting Doors

Spray the door edges first. Then spray any detail work. Then spray the entire door, starting at the top and sweeping your arm back and forth until you reach the bottom. Keep the angle of the spray gun consistent as you spray.

Required Tools for this Project

Have the necessary tools for this DIY project lined up before you start—you'll save time and frustration.

- 4-in-1 screwdriver
- Bucket

- Cordless drill
- Paintbrush
- Putty knife
- Rags
- Safety glasses
- Shop vacuum
- Utility knife

You'll also need a cleaning sponge, a mask respirator, a spray gun and a lazy Susan turntable.

Required Materials for this Project

Avoid last-minute shopping trips by having all your materials ready ahead of time. Here's a list.

- 1 mil plastic drop cloth
- 320 grit sandpaper
- Cardboard
- Floetrol
- Latex enamel
- Masking paper
- Painter's tape
- Rosin paper
- spackling compound
- Stain-blocking primer

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