

## Paint & Wood Preservatives

### Why we care

Outdoor wood and decks need to be protected from the elements, but before you buy paints, stains, or lumber, be aware that these products can be harmful to your health and the environment. Oil-based paints and wood preservatives contain solvents that emit toxic vapors when drying and require toxic thinners for cleanup. Lumber used for decks is often mixed with plastic or treated with a copper-based chemical toxic to fish. Neither can be recycled or burned.

### Simple, positive steps

- Today's latex paints are durable enough for exterior use. Choose one with 25 grams/liter or less VOCs. Buy only the amount of paint you need by measuring the square footage of your project before the purchase.
- When selecting a product, look for opacity. Paint is a lot like sunscreen for wood. The thicker and more opaque the product, the longer the product will last.
- Throw away dried up paint, and [recycle leftover paint](#) you won't use. Take thinners, strippers, or preservatives to a hazardous waste facility.
- If old paint needs to be removed, use sandpaper or a scraper in homes built after 1978 (lead-free). If not feasible, use a water-based stripper.
- Wood preservatives are not generally needed unless the wood is touching the soil. Juniper, redwood, and cedar are naturally rot-resistant and can be further protected with water repellents and sealers. For decks, consider [Timber Pro UV Wood Finish](#), which has a local outlet.
- Pressure-treated woods produced since 2003 generally contain copper azole or ACQ. If you have a structure made with pretreated wood, [follow these precautions](#).

*Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at [jeanne@earthleaders.org](mailto:jeanne@earthleaders.org).*