

Paint stripping tips

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Mark from Toronto, Ontario is looking at a good paint stripper that will remove multiple layers of paint from his doors.

Professional

In a trip to Ross Furniture Refinishing. in Toronto, Ontario, Gino Piazza gave us some tips about how the professionals do it, then we talked about doing it yourself.

The professionals work in three steps, starting with a thick jell stripper to take off the bulk. Just slop it onto the surface heavily, as working the striper with a paint brush will cause the solvents to evaporate faster. Use a bristle brush as the stripper may melt synthetic brushes. An important detail at this point is to get this stripper heavily into the corners and into the details of any trim work. Don't let it dry, or you will have to strip the stripper. Round off the ends of your scraper so it won't gouge the wood.

The next step is one that is almost impossible to do at home. They call it a 'flow over system' where they literally pour gallons of liquid, almost as caustic as the gelled stripper, right over the door, which of course is collected in a large industrial bin below the work. This removes the wax and all the little paint residue missed by the scrapper.

The third step, which you really don't want to do at home is to pour on a very volatile, almost explosive, solvent over the stripped door and it leaves the wood chemically dry. But to do this you need special ventilators and other safety equipment. The reason Gino goes so far is that he needs a totally clean surface to allow him to finish the door with special lacquers which could discolour if there were any impurities left. Gino says, if you are doing this at home, and finishing with ordinary stains or even paints, you can get by with ordinary off the shelf strippers.

DIY

When working with these materials, we need to wear gloves. Rubber gloves hold up the best, but are awkward to work with. Now there are disposable gloves that we can use, but be careful, all disposable gloves are not equal. If you look at the photo, you will see three different disposable gloves that we filled with paint stripper, to see which ones would eat holes in the gloves. The glove on the left is a vinyl glove, and the paint stripper is actually leaking right through. The one on the right looks the same but is made out of latex, and it is holding up much better. The blue one is the strongest of the three, called a Nitrile glove.

Back to Mark's question about getting heavy paint off when working at home.

Gino suggests the gel stripper. I suggest first a hot air stripper as a rough off followed by the gel stripper. In the long run using a hot air gun is cheaper because it requires buying much less chemical stripper. For a paint or dark stain job, finish with steel wool dipped in a liquid stripper.

If you want to really get down to beautiful wood, you can do a modified home version of Gino's third step. Mix 50% Methyl Hydrate and 50% Lacquer Thinner. This is the least environmentally friendly of all strippers, is quite flammable and requires extremely good ventilation if not a gas mask, but perfectionists use it because it will reveal the original grain and colour of the wood as no other regular stripper can.

On the other end of the spectrum you could use the new environmentally friendly strippers. They do work, but are much slower than all others.

Covering any stripper with plastic wrap will trap in the solvents and force it down into the paint, making all of them work a bit better with less chemical.

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