How to Paint Bare Wood

Standard Operating Procedure / V4

Jenn Largesse / This Old House DIY Expert - House One Editor
My goal with this procedure is to save you time, money, and trips to the store.
Have you ever ended up applying too many coats of paint to wood, only to have stains bleed through and ruin your finish? Read Jenn Largesse's recommended steps for painting bare wood.

Step 1: Put on an N-95 mask, sand the surface with 150-grit sandpaper and wipe clean with a cloth.
> ➤ Put on an N-95 mask to protect lungs from fine dust or hazardous substances.
> ➤ Sanding opens the grain of the wood, and it will help the paint to adhere.

Step 2: Seal the knots with an oil-based spray primer.
> ➤ Use a spray primer like Kilz (a low-odor option) or Shellac (dries quickly and seals well).
> ➤ Be aware when working with pine that knots often bleed through a fresh coat of white paint.

Step 3: Consider tinted primer and choose the right base for your color.
Consult your paint expert to choose the correct base for your paint, including the required tint for your primer – a bright colored topcoat or a dark color requires a custom tinted primer.
> ➤ Before you reach for a "paint and primer in one", know that a dedicated primer typically has a higher concentration of solids which will better fill the grain for a smoother topcoat.
> ➤ Do not tint a primer more than 50% to retain the strength of the primer.

Step 4: Put on mask and apply two coats of primer and sand the surface.
Apply the primer with a brush or foam roller and wait the first coat to dry; it should be smooth and opaque.

Step 4.1: Lightly sand the surface to knock down the grain, which rises due to the moisture.

Step 4.2: Apply second coat of primer.
> ➤ Bare wood loves to soak up paint. It's normal for coats to look uneven.

Step 5: Put on mask and apply coats of paint.
Apply paint and wait a few hours until the paint dries and repeat as needed to achieve the desired hue.
> ➤ A brightly colored topcoat painted over primer (versus bare wood) will achieve its final hue with fewer coats.
> ➤ Likewise, a dark color painted over a custom-tinted primer will reach its darker tone with fewer coats.

Flow Chart / V3

Put on an N-95 mask, sand the surface with a 150-grit sandpaper and wipe clean with a cloth

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Seal the knots with an oil-based spray primer

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Consider tinted primer and choose correct color base

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Put on mask and apply one coat of primer with a brush or roller foam

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Is primer dry?

No → Wait at least two hours

Yes ↓

Lightly sand the surface and apply second coat of primer

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Is primer dry?

No → Wait at least two hours

Yes ↓

Put on mask, and apply first coat of paint

↓

Is paint dry?

No → Wait at least two hours

Yes → Put on mask, and apply final coat