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Preparing for Exterior Painting

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

Joe Cox, Extension Specialist in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture

(N.D.)

4 pages

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# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

Departments of  
Human Environment and Design  
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## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension Bulletin E-814

### PREPARING FOR EXTERIOR PAINTING

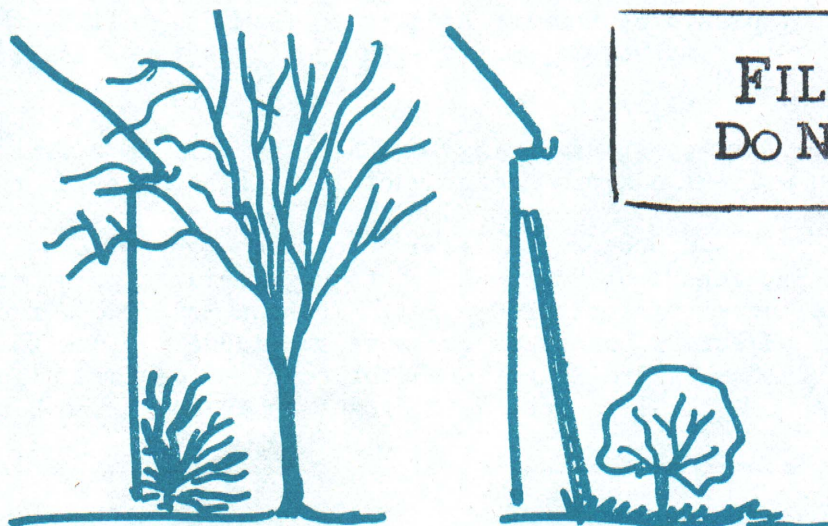
High cost of labor and materials have made "do-it-yourself" housepainters out of millions of homeowners. The benefits of maintaining a home in a good state of repair and finish are obvious. Regardless of previous experience, almost anyone can learn how to do a commendable job of exterior home maintenance.

This leaflet gives pointers on preparing the space around a house for exterior painting or other treatment. It is concerned largely with the area immediately around the base of the house. No matter what kind of finish you apply to the house you need space for ladders or scaffolding so that you can paint competently, safely and protect any greenery that is part of the nearby landscape.

So, in preparing a house for a new surface treatment, make sure you have free access to the walls, overhang and window frames. Scraping and sanding, or replacing loose nails, will require a ladder, scaffolding or other support above that area of human reach.

Pruning shrubbery near the house ahead of time will make the painting easier and safer. Keep three or four pruning principles in mind:

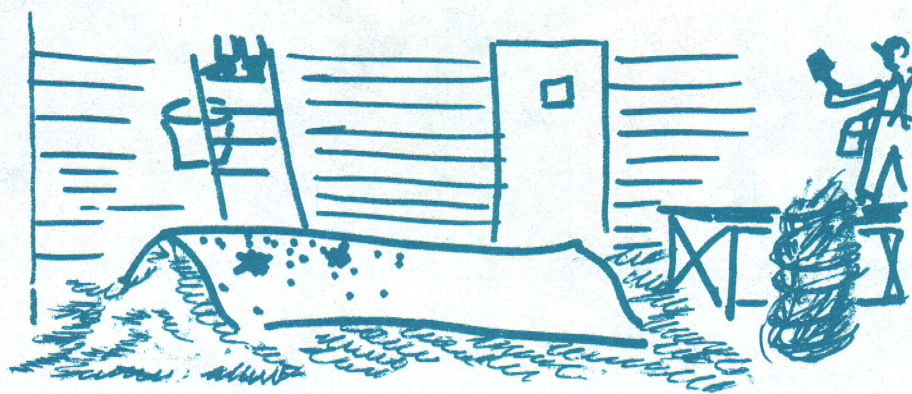
1. Prune out dead, diseased and damaged stems at any time of year. Cut them as close to the soil or main stem as possible. You may find more time to accomplish this in winter or other off season periods. A small scratch with the thumb nail or pruner blade will determine living



DIFFICULT TO PAINT

EASY TO PAINT





### WAYS TO MAKE EXTERIOR PAINTING EASIER

or dead limbs -- green moist bark indicates life while brown dry shriveled bark indicates dead stems.

2. Head back (cut off) ungainly or overly long shoots at a point within the natural form of the plant.

3. If mature, older branches block movement around the base of the house, remove about one third of them. Note that it is not one third of all the branches, but one third of the old mature branches that should be removed. Spreading evergreens, especially needled varieties, will be hard to work around. This is especially true if they have not been pruned for many years.

To prune spreading evergreens, cut the stems at forks of the branch or other places where the cutting will not show. Badly neglected plants can be cut out and replaced later in a more appropriate space.

It is seldom wise to saw plants off at ground level unless you wish to leave a root there that will regrow or you wish to restrict movement and use of the area. A good way to remove old plants is to expose the bracing roots by digging around the base of the plant. Then cut off the supporting roots with an axe or hatchet. This allows the weight of the top of the plant to help pull out the core of base roots. This method takes more time but is better than simply sawing off at ground level. You can uproot plants by hooking a chain to them and pulling them out with a tractor. This method may mar the turf of your lawn less if done during winter.

Time spent preparing for painting will save time later in clean-up. You will also avoid damaging or spattering paint on the plants.

A good protective measure to take when painting the house is to use "drop cloths" or "tarpaulins" to cover plants or other objects. This protects them from spattered paint. You can move these from plant to plant or object to object as you move the ladder or scaffolding. In some cases, you can carefully raise the branches of certain plants and tie them up for more workable space in the tight area around the base of a house.



## SAFETY ALWAYS A GOOD POLICY

Practice safety when painting! Don't let ladders become off balance with one leg in soft soil. Watch out for tree branches, retaining wall or planters. Use sturdy and well-maintained ladders. Beware cracked rungs! Wear protective clothing to avoid injury from rough or thorny plant forms, branches or electric wires. Well-insulated wires are not a hazard, but always practice safety to avoid electric shock from old or worn areas on wires. Give yourself the benefit of the doubt!

## COLOR, TEXTURE, FINISH

Color, texture and finish are important in selecting a paint that will be both pleasing and serviceable. Consult a paint dealer, your county Extension office or local library for ideas or suggestions.

## WHAT TO USE

What kind of finish is the major question. "Finish" means "surface treatment." Ask yourself what effect you want to achieve from a finish: should it be highly visible?- do people come in contact with it?- is it easily maintained?- and repaired?- will it expand and contract in heat and cold?- how long will it hold up?- will it attract or repel insects and spiders? Ask local suppliers for answers. Paint and other materials are their speciality. Generally, paint will be best for smooth surfaces. Baked-on enamel over metal siding may only need a washing with soap and water, or water alone.

Be sure to evaluate acids or detergents before using them on metal, wood or masonry surfaces. Oil or latex paint is a good choice for some wood surfaces. Stain is effective on rough-sawn surfaces and seldom gets thick enough to peel.

If you have a peeling problem, find out what caused it before repainting. Experiment--with a paint dealer's advice--before re-doing the whole job.

New plastic surfaces can be effective in extreme weather conditions or where buildings are subject to air- or water-borne chemical reactions.

## ACCESSORIES

Besides your house itself, you may have many accessories that need proper maintenance: out-door furniture, fences, gates, trellises, arbors, flag poles, mailboxes, garbage cans, name and number signs, road-side stands, pet shelters, storage structures and equipment. All of these need protection from weather and wear-and-tear which paint or stain can give.

Wooden posts in contact with the soil need attention, too. Ideally they should be pressure-treated before the fence is built to protect your investment in them. (Railroad ties are a good example of the value of pressure-treated wood with chemicals.)



Proper winter storage is crucial to the long life of accessories. Moisture and air pollutants are major problems, others are fungus or algae growth on wood.

Psychologically, finishes have the same effect as attractive clothing. Family pride, self-esteem and preservation of family and community values rest on long-lasting quality and attractiveness, in your home and its outside accessories. Home maintenance should be a pleasant, wholesome activity. From a purely practical standpoint, it saves money, builds family pride and protects your investment.

Maintenance takes time! It takes effort too, and it offers opportunity for training young people for tasks which many of them will assume later in life. Pride in home ownership is usually coupled with feelings of achievement and personal success. The rewards are abundant for all members of the family and for all ages.

By Joe Cox, Extension Specialist in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture