

Roller covers key to great paint job

Painting is certainly one of the perennial favorite projects for do-it-yourselfers. You can transform a room in just a short time, and perhaps best of all, you need only a few basic tools.

In addition to a good paint brush, a quality roller cover is one of the essentials. And as with brushes, professional-quality equipment costs only a few dollars more than the low-end stuff, and the difference in ease of use and the quality of the finished product makes the small additional expense well worth it!

ROLLER COVERS

A roller cover is basically a long, hollow tube covered with fabric, foam or other material. It fits over the cage on the roller frame, and is what actually holds and applies the paint. There is a huge selection of roller covers available, but you need only a couple of them and they are interchangeable on the roller frame, so you can mix and match the covers to suit just about any painting situation. There are several different types of fabrics and other materials that are used to make roller covers, and choosing the right one can sometimes be a little confusing. Which type you select is dependent on the type of paint or other finish you're applying, the type of surface you're painting, and the type of finish you want to achieve (for example, smooth or textured).

Synthetic Fabrics: Many roller covers are covered with fabrics that are made from a blend of synthetic fibers. Often, these are proprietary blends developed by specific manufacturers to meet specific painting needs, so follow what that particular manufacturer lists as being acceptable uses for any given roller cover.

In general, synthetic fabric covers are suitable for most types of latex and oil-based paints, making them good all-purpose covers. They are typically not rated for use with such coatings as polyurethane and epoxy.

Lamb's Wool and Lamb's Wool Blends: Lamb's wool covers are generally softer and more dense than synthetic fabric covers, so they hold more paint with less spatter. They tend to roll out the paint a little faster and smoother as well, creating a very uniform finish. The 100 percent natural lamb's wool covers are typically suitable for all paints, including latex, but they actually work best with oil-based products. There are also lamb's wool and synthetic fiber blends, which take some of the best characteristics of each material and are better suited for use with water-based products.

Mohair and Mohair Blends: Mohair covers are very good on smooth surfaces, such as interior and exterior wood and metal doors. They have virtually no shedding problems, and leave a very nice, texture-free finish. The 100 percent mohair covers are intended for use with oil-based paints, epoxies, varnishes and urethanes. There are also some mohair/synthetic blends that will work with latex paints. Because they are intended for smooth surfaces, you will find mohair covers only in short naps.

Foam and Slit-Foam Covers: Roller covers made from 1/4-inch foam are generally best suited for smooth surfaces and the application of enamel, varnish and similar materials. They leave no lint

behind and also do not impart any texture to the material being applied, and the fact that they don't hold much material helps keep you from overcoating the surface.

Longer, slit-foam rollers are great for painting uneven surfaces such as masonry and stucco, and they are definitely the best choice for painting acoustic ("popcorn") ceilings. They can be used with all types of paints, including latex.

Specialty Covers: There are also a number of roller covers that are manufactured to accomplish very specific tasks.

Stipple: "Stippling" is a form of texture painting, in which the paint is rolled on so that it produces small bumps as opposed to going on completely smooth. This is accomplished through the use of specialty stipple roller covers that utilize a twisted fabric similar to low-nap carpet. They can be used with most kinds of paints, but are typically most effective when used with thicker texture paints. These covers also work well for applying anti-skid paints.

Texture: With the popularity of faux finishes, there are now a number of roller covers on the market that utilize a covering of looped or twisted plastic to apply paint while leaving a very distinct texture. They are designed for use with thicker texture paints, and also work well for applying certain types of masonry sealers on medium to coarse aggregate surfaces.

Epoxy: These are special plastic or fabric-blend covers that are intended for use with difficult to apply coatings such as epoxy and urethane. Coatings such as these are sticky, and specialty epoxy roller covers allow the coatings to release more quickly from the fabric for smoother application.

NAP LENGTH

The nap length refers to how long the fibers on the roller cover are. Naps range in length from 1/8 inch to 1 1/4 inches, and regardless of what type of fabric you are using, there are two simple rules of thumb to remember when selecting a nap length:

Shorter naps hold less paint and leave less texture on the surface, while longer naps hold more paint and leave more texture behind.

The smoother the surface you're painting, the shorter the nap should be; the rougher the surface, the longer the nap should be.

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