

You chose your color, got the surface ready, and then started painting. Then you look up at the sky and see clouds coming in. You might also finish the first coat and then wonder how long you have to wait before putting on the second one. Or maybe you're just trying to decide if painting this weekend is a good idea.

Most people don't know for sure how long it takes for exterior paint to dry. That guesswork causes ruined finishes, wasted materials, and work that has to be redone much sooner than it should. The answers are more specific than you might think, and they depend on the situation more than any paint tin label can fully explain.

This is all the information you need to do a good job painting the outside of your house the first time.

## **The Short Answer: How Long Does Exterior Paint Take to Dry?**

Most exterior paints are touch-dry within one to two hours of being applied, as long as the weather is good. But "touch-dry" and "ready-to-recoat" are not the same thing. Between coats, most exterior paints need four to six hours. The paint reaches its maximum hardness and durability after two to four weeks of full cure.

Those numbers are based on perfect conditions. Temperatures between 50°F and 85°F (10°C and 30°C), relative humidity below 70%, no direct sunlight on the painted surface, and a light breeze to help the paint dry. The timeline changes when you change any one of those variables a lot.

The kind of paint is also very important. Latex and acrylic paints for the outside of buildings dry faster than oil-based paints. The surface being painted affects how much paint it absorbs and how quickly it dries. The number of coats and how thick they are make a big difference.

## **Drying Time by Paint Type**

The first step in making a realistic guess about how long it will take to dry is to know what kind of exterior paint you are using.

## **Latex and Water-Based Acrylic Exterior Paint**

This is the most common type of paint used on the outside of homes today. Some brands that fit into this group are Behr, Sherwin-Williams Emerald Exterior, and Benjamin Moore Aura Exterior.

Under good conditions, water-based exterior paints will be touch-dry in one to two hours. After four to six hours, they are ready for a second coat. It takes about 30 days for the paint to fully cure. During this time, it gets harder and more resistant to scrubbing, UV rays, and moisture.

This is exactly how long it takes for Behr exterior paint to dry. According to the Behr Premium Plus Exterior line, you should wait four hours at 77°F (25°C) and 50% humidity before applying a second coat. That four-hour window gets longer when it's cooler or more humid. Below, we'll go into more detail about how long it takes for Behr exterior paint to dry before it rains. In general, Behr says to wait at least four hours before it rains.

## **Oil-Based Exterior Paint**

Compared to water-based paints, oil-based paints take a lot longer to dry. It usually takes six to eight hours for the paint to dry enough to touch. The minimum time between coats is 24 hours. It takes a lot longer for the paint to fully cure; it can take several months for it to reach its hardest point.

Because they take longer to dry and have more VOCs, oil-based paints are less common for full exterior repaints these days.

They are still useful for certain tasks, like metal surfaces, high-traffic areas, and outside trim, where their durability and leveling abilities make the wait worth it.

## **Primer**

Primer for the outside, whether it's water- or oil-based, is not the same as topcoat, and it takes different amounts of time to dry.

It takes 30 minutes to an hour for most water-based exterior primers to dry enough to touch and one to three hours for them to be ready for a topcoat. Before putting on the top coat, oil-based primers need to dry for eight to twenty-four hours. Putting

on the topcoat too soon, before the primer has fully dried, can cause problems with adhesion and an uneven finish.

## How Temperature Affects Exterior Paint Drying Time

The temperature is the most important thing that affects how quickly paint dries on the outside. The temperature of the air has a direct effect on how paint dries. In latex paints, the water evaporates, and in oil-based paints, the paint oxidizes.

**Below 50°F (10°C):** Most outside paints shouldn't be used at all if the temperature is below 50°F (10°C). When the temperature is low, latex paint doesn't dry properly, which makes the finish crack, peel, or chalk too soon. If you paint when it's cold, the surface might look fine right after you do it, but it might not last through the winter.

**50°F to 60°F (10°C to 15°C):** The paint dries, but not very quickly. Add two or three times the time you think it will take to dry and recoat. If the temperature is going to drop below 50°F within 24 hours of applying the paint, don't paint. The paint won't have had enough time to cure in the cold.

**60°F to 85°F (15°C to 30°C):** The best range is between 60°F and 85°F (15°C and 30°C). The label on the paint tells you how long it takes to dry. This is when companies test their goods, so the times given in this range are the most accurate.

**Above 85°F (30°C):** When the temperature is above 85°F (30°C), paint can dry too quickly on hot surfaces. This can cause the outer skin to form before the paint underneath has had a chance to level and bond properly. This causes brush marks, lap marks, and bad adhesion.

When the sun shines directly on a dark surface in the afternoon, it can make the surface temperature much higher than the air temperature, making the problem worse. In the morning, when it's cooler, or in the shade, paint.

## How Humidity Affects Drying Time

The rate at which water evaporates from a water-based paint film is affected by both humidity and temperature. High humidity makes evaporation happen much more slowly, which makes each step of the drying process take longer.

If the humidity is higher than 70 to 85 percent, you should wait to paint the outside if you can. The paint will dry eventually, but it takes a lot longer than the label says. The longer it stays wet, the more likely it is to sag, run, or pick up dust and debris from the air before it sets.

The humidity in the morning is usually higher than in the afternoon. Starting at dawn on humid days doesn't work as well as waiting until mid-morning, when the air has had time to warm up and the moisture levels have gone down.

## **How Long for Exterior Paint to Dry Before Rain?**

This is one of the most important questions when it comes to painting outside. The honest answer is that it depends on how dry the paint is and how hard it will rain.

As a general rule of thumb, water-based paint for the outside of a house needs at least two hours to dry before light rain becomes a big problem. Four hours gives you a lot more room to breathe. A short shower after four hours usually won't ruin a latex exterior paint job, but if the rain is heavy or lasts a long time, it could leave marks or slightly damage the surface.

For Behr exterior paint specifically, the manufacturer's guidance aligns with this general rule. Behr recommends allowing a minimum of four hours of drying time before rain exposure for their water-based exterior lines.

Because it takes longer for oil-based exterior paint to dry, it is more likely to be damaged by rain. Heavy rain on a freshly painted surface can still cause damage after eight hours. If rain is expected within the next 24 hours, it's safer to wait to paint the outside of your house with oil-based paint.

The worst case scenario is that it rains within the first hour of application, when the paint is still very wet. This will wash away, leave streaks, and ruin the surface completely, so the work will have to be done again. If it rains unexpectedly within two hours of applying the paint, cover any painted surfaces you can with a tarp or sheeting, making sure it doesn't touch the wet paint.

## **How Long Does It Take for Exterior Paint to Dry**

## on Wood?

Wood is one of the most variable surfaces on the outside because different types of wood, ages, grain orientations, and moisture levels absorb paint in different ways.

New or bare wood soaks up paint quickly and heavily. The first coat on bare wood often sinks in faster than on wood that has already been painted. This makes the touch-dry time feel shorter, but it actually means that the paint has been absorbed instead of forming a proper surface film. You usually need a second coat on bare wood, and sometimes a third coat.

Painted wood that is in good shape absorbs paint more evenly and dries at a rate that is closer to the standard for the product being used. Old paint on wood that has been weathered or chalked can pull moisture out of the new coat, which can make it take longer to dry and make it harder for the new coat to stick. Cleaning and lightly sanding painted surfaces that have been outside for a long time before repainting makes a big difference in how well the paint sticks and dries.

The amount of moisture in the wood itself is very important. If you paint over wood that is wet or damp from rain, dew, or high humidity, it is likely that the paint will not stick. Wait at least 24 to 48 hours after a lot of rain before painting wood surfaces. This is because the surface needs to be completely dry first.

## Drying Time vs Cure Time: Why the Difference Matters

Most people think paint is done when it is dry to the touch. Professionals know that being dry and being cured are two different states with different effects on the work.

**Dry to touch:** When you lightly press on the paint surface, it doesn't leave any marks on your finger. For water-based exterior paint, it usually takes one to two hours.

**Dry to recoat:** The first coat has dried enough that you can put on a second coat without moving or lifting it. Water-based exterior paint usually takes four to six hours to dry.

**Fully cured:** This means that the paint has finished the chemical process that makes it hard and has reached its highest level of hardness, adhesion strength, and resistance to weather, moisture, and wear. For water-based exterior paint, it usually takes two to four weeks.

The paint works during the cure time, but it's not as strong as it will be later. For at least two weeks, don't scrub, pressure wash, or hit freshly painted outside surfaces. For the first week, try not to let garden hoses, sprinklers, or standing water touch the surface if you can help it.

## **Tips for Getting Exterior Paint to Dry Properly**

A few simple habits can make a big difference in how quickly the paint dries and how well it lasts.

### **Paint in the right direction with the sun**

When painting, go with the sun. In the morning, start on the side of the house that is in the shade and move with the sun as it moves. This stops you from painting on a surface that is too hot and keeps the sun from baking your paint before it has had a chance to level out.

### **Apply thin, even coats**

Put on thin, even coats. Thick coats take a lot longer to dry and are more likely to run, sag, and cure unevenly. Two thin coats are always better than one thick coat in terms of how long they last and how good they look.

### **Do not paint over dew**

The sun warms up morning dew on outside surfaces, making it invisible, but it stays on the surface and makes it less sticky. Before you start, make sure the surfaces are completely dry and warm. This usually means waiting at least an hour after sunrise on a clear morning.

### **Check the forecast properly.**

Not just the temperature of the air, but also the temperature of the surface. A clear, cold night after a warm day of painting can drop the surface temperature enough to

change the cure. When planning to paint the outside of your house, make sure to check the weather both at night and during the day.

The [home improvement guides at Home Narratives](#) give you practical, detailed advice on a wide range of topics to help you plan and carry out home improvement projects inside and outside

The [Paint Quality Institute](#) is also a great place to learn about the technical aspects of how paint works, how long it takes to dry, and how long it lasts in different weather.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How long does it take for paint to dry outside before you can put on a second coat?**

In good conditions, most water-based exterior paints need four to six hours between coats. Oil-based paints for the outside need at least 24 hours. Putting on a second coat too soon keeps moisture and solvents trapped under the surface, which causes bubbling, poor adhesion, and a finish that doesn't last as long as it should.

### **How long does it take for paint on the outside to dry before it rains?**

For light rain, give it at least two hours. For heavier or longer-lasting rain, give it at least four hours. If you are using oil-based paint, wait 24 hours before it gets wet. If you think it might rain in the next four hours, put off painting.

### **Does the weather affect how long it takes for paint on the outside to dry?**

Yes, a lot. Most exterior paints shouldn't be used when the temperature is below 50°F (10°C). When the temperature is between 50°F and 60°F, it takes about twice

as long to dry and recoat as it does when the temperature is between 60°F and 85°F. Before you start painting the outside of your house, always check the overnight forecast temperatures, not just the daytime ones.

## **How long does it take for paint on the outside of wood to dry?**

For water-based paint, the time it takes to dry on bare or raw wood is about the same as on other surfaces: one to two hours. However, the wood absorbs more paint, so a second coat is almost always needed. The amount of moisture in the wood itself is the most important thing. Before painting, wood that is wet or has just rained on it should be left to dry for 24 to 48 hours.

## **How long does it take for paint to dry inside versus outside?**

In controlled conditions, interior paint usually dries faster than exterior paint. This is because the temperature and humidity inside are more stable, and there is no direct wind, sun, or cold working against the drying process. It takes 30 to 60 minutes for standard interior latex paint to dry enough to touch, and it takes two to four hours for a second coat to be ready. However, interior paint is also less durable than exterior paint because it is designed for indoor use.

The key to getting exterior paint to dry properly is to work with the weather instead of against it. Pick the right day, put on thin coats, follow the recoat and cure times, and keep an eye on the weather. If you do those things all the time, your outside paint job will last for years longer than one that was done quickly on the wrong day and in bad weather.

What is the hardest part of painting the outside of your house? The answer is almost always in the preparation, not the painting itself, whether it's timing, surface prep, or picking the right product.