

Mildew on Exterior House Paints

DESCRIPTION OF MILDEW

Mildew, a discoloration on the surface of house paint, is caused by certain stain fungi (small forms of plant life). The most common species are black, but some are red, green, or other colors. Mildew fungi grow most extensively in warm, humid climates. They grow on paint on both sunny and shaded sides of buildings, but particularly on walls behind trees or shrubs where movement of air is restricted.

Mildew fungi can be distinguished from dirt by examination under a magnifying glass. In the growing stage, when the paint surface is damp or wet, the fungus is characterized by its threadlike growth. In its dormant stage, when the surface is dry, it has numerous egg-shaped spores; by contrast, granular particles of dirt are irregular in size and shape.

HOW PAINT MAKEUP AFFECTS MILDEW

Some paints are more vulnerable than others to attack by mildew fungi. Zinc oxide, a common paint pigment in top coats, mildly inhibits the growth of these fungi, thus paints that contain an appreciable amount of zinc oxide are not so vulnerable to mildew. Titanium pigments have very little inhibiting effect.

Mildew develops on soft paints more readily than on hard ones; for example, it progresses more readily on exterior house paint than on exterior enamel. Paints containing linseed oil without zinc oxide pigment or a fungicide are very susceptible to mildew. Porous latex paints without fungicide applied over a primer with linseed oil will develop severe mildew in warm, damp climates.

Mildew on painted clabboard



PREVENTION AND CURE

1. In warm, damp climates where mildew occurs frequently, use a paint containing zinc oxide for top coats over the primer coat.
 2. For mild cases of mildew, use a paint containing mildewcide (a poison for mildew fungi). Frequently, a mildewcide can be purchased at a paint store and mixed into the paint.
 3. Ideally, to cure mildew, remove the mildew from the oil paint surface and apply a paint that contains mildewcide.
 4. To kill the fungi and clean areas for repainting, scrub the paint surface with the following solution:
3 ounces (2/3 cup) trisodium phosphate or commercially available substitute
1 ounce (1/3 cup) household detergent
1 quart (5%) sodium hypochlorite (household bleach)
3 quarts warm water or enough to make one gallon
- Scrub with a fairly soft brush. When clean rinse thoroughly with fresh water from a hose. Avoid splashing the solution on shrubbery or grass; it may have harmful effects. This treatment should be effective except for the most stubborn cases.
5. After removing the mildew, and before contamination occurs, repaint with a zinc oxide paint or a paint containing fungicide.

