



Recommended Cedar Exterior Finish

HOW TO APPLY FINISHING TO REAL CEDAR

How a finish is applied to cedar is as important for durability and good performance as is the finish-substrate combination chosen for the job. Finishes can be brushed, rolled, sprayed, or applied by dipping. The application technique, the quality, and quantity of finish applied, the surface condition of the substrate, and the weather conditions at the time of application can substantially influence the life expectancy of the finish. The application guidelines suggested here should be followed in concert with the manufacturer's directions for the product.

PAINTS

Paints of all types such as vinyl-acrylic, modified-acrylic, and oil-based topcoats are all suitable for cedar but test results show that good-quality 100%-acrylic formulations perform best. To achieve maximum paint life, follow these steps:

1. On bare new or restored cedar, apply one coat only of water-repellent preservative (1% or less of wax by volume and content). Allow it to dry for the period of time recommended by the manufacturer. If the wood has been dip treated, a longer drying time may be needed. Do not paint before the solvent from the water-repellent preservative has evaporated because the paint may then be slow to dry, may discolor, or dry with a rough surface.
2. Apply a good quality stain-blocking primer as soon as possible after the water-repellent has dried. The primer coat is very important because it forms a base for all succeeding paint coats and should be used whether the topcoat is oil-based or latex-based. Application rates recommended by the manufacturer should be followed.
3. Apply the topcoat over the primer. If two topcoats are to be applied, allow the first to cure for the period recommended by the manufacturer before applying the second. In cold or damp weather, allow extra time between coats.

WATER-REPELLENT PRESERVATIVES

Water-repellent preservatives should be used only on newly manufactured bare cedar, on restored bare cedar, or on cedar previously treated with the same type of product. Application of preservative by brush, pad, or roller followed by thorough back-brushing is equally effective. When cedar is treated after the structure has been completed, liberal amounts of the solution should be applied to all lap and butt joints, edges, and ends of boards. Other areas vulnerable to moisture penetration, such as below doors and window frames, also need to be treated.

When used as a natural finish, the service life of a water-repellent is only one to two years depending upon the wood and the exposure. Treatments on textured surfaces generally last longer than those on smooth surfaces. Dip treatment prior to installation or repeated brush treatment to the point of refusal will enhance the finish durability. The more finish absorbed by the wood, the longer the service life. If a water-repellent preservative is used as a pre-treatment before painting, apply only a single coat, and use caution to avoid excessive build-up.

SEMI-TRANSPARENT, OIL-BASED PENETRATING STAINS

Semi-transparent, oil-based penetrating stains may be applied by brush, spray, pad, or roller. Brushing will usually give the best penetration and performance. Spray or roller application followed by back-brushing is also an acceptable method of application. These oil-based stains are generally thin and runny, so the application can be messy. Lap marks can be prevented by staining continuous lengths. This method prevents the front edge of the stained area from drying before a logical stopping place is reached. Working in the shade is desirable because the drying rate is slower. A stain that has been applied by spray without back-brushing is particularly prone to show blotchy patterns as it weathers.

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Recommended Cedar Exterior Finish Continued

Two coats of penetrating oil-based stain on textured cedar will provide longer service life than one coat, but only if the wood will accept the second coat. Stir the stain thoroughly during application to prevent settling and color change. Avoid mixing different brands or batches of stain.

Latex semi-transparent stains do not penetrate the wood surface, but they are easy to apply and less likely to form lap marks. These stains are film-forming and are not as durable as oil-based stains.

SOLID-COLOR STAINS

Solid-color stains may be applied to cedar by brush, roller, or pad. Brush application is usually the best. These stains act much like paint. One coat of solid-color stain is only marginally adequate on new wood. A prime coat with a top coat will always provide better protection and longer service. The best performance can be obtained if the wood is primed, then given two coats of stain. Top coats of 100% acrylic latex solid-color stains are generally superior to all others, especially when two coats are applied over a primer.

Unlike paint, a solid-color stain may leave lap marks. To prevent lap marks, follow the procedures suggested for semi-transparent penetrating stains.

PAINT

Paint provides the most surface protection against weathering and wetting by water while providing color and concealing some of the wood's characteristics. Although paint can reduce wood's absorption of water, paint itself is not a preservative.

Alkyd-oil-based primers usually offer the best shield against discoloration by water-soluble extractives. Latex paint, particularly 100% acrylic formulations, remains more flexible with age and is better able to accommodate dimensional changes by stretching and shrinking with the wood.

SOLID-COLOR STAINS

Solid-color stains are opaque finishes with fewer solids than paint. Available in a wide spectrum of hues, solid-color stains obscure the woods' true color but allow some of the natural characteristics and texture of cedar to remain. Solid-color stains perform best on textured surfaces. They are non-penetrating and, like paints, form a film. A stain-blocking primer should be applied first, followed by a 100% acrylic latex-based top coat.

NATURAL FINISHES

WATER-REPELLENTS

Water-repellents and water-repellent preservatives may be applied to cedar used above ground. These formulations reduce water absorption in the short term. The addition of a fungicide that inhibits the growth of mildew and decay fungi will further increase wood's durability. A low-wax-content water-repellent preservative applied to newly-milled cedar as a single-coat pre-treatment before painting may help reduce discoloration caused by bleeding of water-soluble extractives.

SEMI-TRANSPARENT STAINS

Semi-transparent stains may be latex or oil-based. The semi-transparent nature of the stain, due to its low solids content, does not block all ultraviolet radiation and some will reach the wood's surface. Latex stains do not penetrate the surface and are not as durable.