



BRIGHTON PEACE & ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

DECORATING

Interior decorating can make our homes nicer places to live in. However, many paints and other DIY products are derived from non-degradable petrochemicals, and the production process uses lots of energy. Manufacturing one litre of paint can produce about 10 litres of toxic waste. Also, many decorating products contain toxic and problematic chemicals. Safe and green alternatives do exist and work just as well, if not better.

Toxic and Problematic Chemicals

Many paints, varnishes and stains release **volatile organic compounds** (VOCs) into the air. They can aggravate allergies and chest complaints such as asthma, as well as pollute the environment. Gloss paint usually has much higher levels of VOCs than emulsion. Most paint manufacturers now specify the VOC level on their tins, and also make low VOC products, but these still contain heavy metals, solvents and other toxic and cancer-causing chemicals.

Gloss paints contain many **solvents**. So choose matt, eggshell, or satin finish paints.

Some environmentalists recommend avoiding paints containing **titanium dioxide**, the mining of which has a significant environmental impact. Some natural paint companies offer a choice of paints without titanium.

Paint strippers contain **dichloromethane**, thought to be carcinogenic. Some companies, such as **Ecos**, sell environmentally-friendly paint strippers, or you could simply use a heat gun or sand off the old paint.

Disposal of Paint

Never pour leftover paints into drains; save it for future paint jobs or recycle them. If you only have small amounts left, leave to dry so it can be disposed of as solid waste. Recycle your leftover paint by joining the **Freecycle**

community at www.freecycle.org.uk.

Brighton & Hove City Council have a community repaint scheme, where you can dispose of unwanted paints at the **Household waste recycling site**, *Aldrington Avenue* off the Old Shoreham Road, *Hove*. Register with your details at www.veolia.co.uk/southdowns or 01273 765289.

Natural Alternatives

You can make your own natural paints using harmless ingredients: see **The Natural Paint Decorator**, published by Kyle Cathie, for some recipes.

When buying paints, generally plant-based, water-borne paints are the best natural paints, followed by plant and solvent-based ones with natural solvents. Natural paints vary greatly; for instance, **Ecos** include synthetic chemicals but no solvents, whilst others, such as **Auro Organic** are more natural overall.

Emulsion Paints

Nutshell, followed by **Auro**, which are both petrochemical free, came top in *Ethical Consumer* magazine. **Ecos**, **Green Paints** and **EarthBorn Clayprint** came next. They are all animal and solvent-free.

B&Q water-based 'minimal' solvent products came out best of the mainstream brands.



Picture courtesy of Nutshell Paints

Gloss Paints

Ethical Consumer rated **Auro** as best, due to their paint being petrochemical free. **Ecoss** were next best, followed by **Green Paints**, both of which are animal and solvent-free. **Impra Profilan**, a water-based 'low' solvent product, came out best of the mainstream brands.

Natural Stains, Varnishes and Waxes

Please try to use plant-based resins and oil with scented turpentine oil and pigments. These allow the wood to breathe. They need to be re-applied more frequently than their chemical equivalent.

Cork-based Fillers

These are a good alternative to the silicon sealant used in most fillers for walls. **Auro** do a multi and a wood filler - www.auro.co.uk.

Wallpaper

Many types of wallpaper are vinyl based, and wallpaper paste is a solvent which often contains fungicides. Wood chip paper and lining paper use fewer resources, last longer, and can be repainted. Use borax instead of fungicide in the paste, or try **Nutshell's** fungicide-free paste.

- **Harlands Organic Furnishings** sells handprinted, environmentally-friendly wallpaper - www.organicfurnishings.co.uk
- **Graham & Brown** supplies eco-wallpaper, printed on sustainable paper using water-based inks - www.grahambrown.com

Where to Buy Natural Decorating Products

- **Biofa** from **Villa Natura Ltd.** However, none of their paints are titanium dioxide-free. *45b Gloucester Street, Brighton* - www.villanatura.co.uk
- **EarthBorn's** eco range is titanium dioxide-free except for a 'miniscule amount' in the white - www.earthbornpaints.co.uk.
- **Brewer & Sons**, *Freshfield Estate, Stevenson Road, Brighton*. Tel: 01273 570243, stock Earthborn's eco paints, or it can be obtained from their central warehouse in Eastbourne.
- **Auro Organic** sells paints and wood varnishes. Their '326 chalk' paint and '751 casein' paint are titanium dioxide-free - www.auro.co.uk
- **Ecoss** Organic paints all contain titanium dioxide. They also sell eco-friendly paint stripper, and solvent-

free varnishes, wood stains and wood glue - www.ecosorganicpaints.co.uk

- **Green Paints** uses locally-sourced ingredients in their pure colour matt emulsion and are titanium dioxide-free. Tel: 01507 327362.
- **Impra Profilan** sells paints, varnishes, wood treatments, adhesives, strippers and sealants - www.imprsystems.co.uk
- **Livos** sells paint, wood stains, oil wax, cleaner, thinner and primer. Some of their gloss paints are titanium dioxide-free; check the technical data sheets on their website at www.livos.com. For contact details of their importers visit www.ecomerchant.co.uk or Tel: 01795 530130.
- **Nutshell** sells paints, wallpaper paste, wood varnishes and stains - www.nutshellpaints.co.uk.



Picture courtesy of Nutshell Paints

You can also purchase environmentally-friendly paints and finishes from www.greenshop.co.uk.

What you can do right now..... Add a natural pigment (from an art supply shop) to all that white emulsion you have left over to create a new exciting shade!

Resources & Further Information

Ethical Consumer, 109 Sept/Oct 2006

'Green Living' by Lynda Brown
Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2000

'Green Living for Dummies' by Liz Barclay &
Michael Grosvenor - John Wiley & Sons, 2007

'The Good Shopping Guide'
Ethical Marketing Group, 2006

'The New Green Consumer Guide' by Julia Hailes
Simon & Schuster, 2007

'The Rough Guide to Ethical Living' by Duncan Clark
Penguin Books, 2006