

How To Paint Kitchen Cabinets Without Sanding

iStock

Want to refresh your kitchen without paying for a full renovation? Consider painting your kitchen cabinets. The task may seem labor-intensive, but you can make it easier by skipping the step of sanding the cabinets first. Our guide explains how to paint your kitchen cabinets without sanding them, spells out which tools you'll need, and describes how to properly maintain your newly painted cabinets.

Assessing Your Cabinets for Paint-Readiness

Before you start painting your cabinets, assess whether they're suitable for the no-sanding approach. If your cabinets have peeling paint, deep scratches, or a very glossy finish, you may have to lightly sand them so that paint can properly adhere to the surface. Cabinets with significant damage or those made of materials such as laminate may also require special preparation.

If your cabinets are in good condition and have smooth, nonglossy surfaces, you don't need to sand first. You probably don't need to sand cabinets with raw, unvarnished wood or those that are smooth to the touch, either.

Essential Materials and Tools for Kitchen Cabinet Painting

Gather the materials and tools you'll need before you start preparing your cabinets for paint. Start with the items below.

- 2 1/2-inch angled brushes
- Bonding primer designed for cabinets
- Clean rags
- Deglosser or liquid sandpaper
- Drop cloths
- Grease-cutting soap or a mixture of vinegar and water
- High-quality cabinet paint (satin or semi-gloss finish)
- Microfiber sponges or Mr. Clean magic erasers
- Paint trays
- Painter's tape
- Protective topcoat (optional)
- Small 4–6 inch rollers

The Step-by-Step Kitchen Cabinet Painting Process

If your cabinets don't need sanding, proceed with the steps below.

Preparing Your Kitchen for Cabinet Painting

Remove all items from your countertops and clear out your cabinets. Remove cabinet doors, drawers, and hardware, and label each piece for easy reassembly later. Cover your countertops, appliances, and floors with drop cloths to protect them from possible paint splatters. Finally, clean all surfaces thoroughly to remove any grease, grime, or food residue that could interfere with paint adhesion.

Cleaning and Degreasing

Begin by thoroughly cleaning all cabinet surfaces with a grease-cutting soap or a vinegar-and-water solution. Take extra care around the stove and other high-grease zones. Use a microfiber sponge or magic eraser to tackle stubborn spots. Finish by rinsing the cabinets with water and allowing them to dry.

Applying Deglosser or Liquid Sandpaper

Apply a deglosser or liquid sandpaper to the cabinets according to the manufacturer's instructions. This will make it easier for paint to adhere to the cabinet's surface without traditional sanding techniques. Wear gloves, and make sure your area is properly ventilated. Allow the surface to dry before moving on to the next step.

Priming the Cabinets

Apply a bonding primer that's designed for cabinets using a 2 1/2-inch angled brush or small roller. Work in the direction of the wood grain and smooth out any drips before they dry. Allow the primer to dry per the manufacturer's instructions. This usually takes about two hours.

Painting Techniques for a Smooth Finish

Paint your cabinets using smooth, even strokes. Start with a thin coat and allow it to dry before applying a second coat. Use a high-quality brush or foam roller to minimize brush marks. You may need to apply two or three coats for full coverage, depending on the color you choose and the paint's overall quality.

Finishing Touches and Hardware Replacement

Once your final coat of paint has dried completely, you can start reassembling your cabinets. You can also use this as an opportunity to update your cabinet hardware. New knobs, pulls, or handles can change the look of your newly painted cabinets and complement your kitchen's updated style.

Choosing the Right Paint for Your Cabinets

The right paint can make a significant difference in the appearance of your cabinets, and how long your cabinets last.

Consider the overall style of your kitchen and home when choosing paint. White and light colors can make a small kitchen feel larger and brighter, while darker colors can add depth and sophistication to a room. Use color swatches or sample pots to test colors in your kitchen's lighting before making a final decision. Choose something that's specifically formulated for high-use surfaces. Look for moisture- and mildew-resistant options that can withstand the heat and humidity of a kitchen environment. Satin or semi-gloss finishes are ideal choices because they are easy to paint and feature a subtle sheen. Consider the options below:

- Cabinet-specific paints from major brands, such as Benjamin Moore or Behr
- ECOS Paints interior air-purifying varnish
- Zero-VOC Harmony interior latex paint from Sherwin-Williams

When comparing indoor cabinet paints to outdoor furniture paints, the differences are striking. While these interior formulations excel at resisting kitchen moisture and grease, wooden garden benches that stay outside all year require entirely different paint chemistry. The best paint for outdoor wood furniture needs UV blockers, freeze-thaw resistance, and weatherproofing additives that would be overkill for kitchen cabinets. I've researched outdoor durability requirements extensively, and year-round weather exposure demands specialized formulations designed specifically for garden benches and similar outdoor wooden furniture. These exterior paints typically cost more but provide the weather-resistant protection that indoor paints simply cannot match for outdoor applications.

Avoiding Common Cabinet Painting Mistakes

To achieve the best results, avoid these common pitfalls:

- **Forgetting to label cabinet doors and hardware:** Proper labeling will help you to easily reassemble.
- **Painting in poor lighting:** Good lighting helps you catch any drips or uneven areas.
- **Rushing the process:** Allow adequate drying time between coats.
- **Skipping the cleaning step:** Thorough cleaning is critical for paint adhesion.
- **Using low-quality paint:** Invest in high-quality, cabinet-specific paint for durability.

Maintaining Your Newly Painted Cabinets

To keep your newly painted cabinets looking fresh, follow these maintenance tips:

- Clean spills immediately to prevent staining.
- Consider applying a clear protective topcoat every few years for added durability.
- Touch up any chips or scratches quickly to prevent further damage.
- Use a soft, damp cloth for regular cleaning, and avoid harsh chemicals.

Alternative Methods for Cabinet Makeovers

If you don't want to paint your kitchen cabinets, you can also update them with cabinet refacing, open shelving, or by hiring a professional painter. Cabinet refacing involves replacing the cabinet doors and drawer fronts, and covering the existing cabinet boxes with a matching veneer. Consider cabinet refacing if your cabinet boxes are in good condition but you want a completely new look. Refacing also gives you the chance to update your cabinet hardware.

If you'd like newly painted cabinets but aren't comfortable tackling the project yourself, hire a professional local painter. Professionals have access to specialized equipment, can save you time, and will complete the job to your standards.

Cost Considerations for Cabinet Makeovers

The cost of updating your kitchen cabinets can change significantly depending on the method you choose. Below is an overview of potential costs:

- **Cabinet refacing:** This option can range from \$4,300–\$10,100, depending on the quality of materials you choose and whether you hire professionals to do the job.
- **Painting cabinets yourself:** DIY kitchen cabinet painting can cost anywhere from \$200–\$600 for paint and supplies.
- **Professional painting services:** Hiring professionals can be more expensive than do-it-yourself techniques and usually costs \$423–\$1,436.

Cost data sourced from Angi.

Painting Kitchen Cabinets: Our Conclusion

Painting kitchen cabinets without sanding is a low-cost way to give your space a facelift. Follow the steps in our guide to achieve professional-looking results. Remember to assess your cabinets and prepare cabinet surfaces before you start painting. Choose high-quality paints, too. Hire professionals if you aren't comfortable painting your cabinets.