

Tried, True, Trustworthy Home Advice

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Painting

How To: Match Paint

Find the exact shade of blue—or any other hue you have in mind—for your paint project with one of these seven color-matching techniques.

By [Michelle Ullman](#) and [Bob Vila](#) | Updated Oct 28, 2019 12:14 PM



Photo: istockphoto.com

Over time, walls throughout the home accumulate dings, nail holes, even random spots where some not-so-temporary tape pulled away a chunk of paint. That's when you pull out the spackling compound, putty knife, and touch-up paint.

Not sure where that old can went? Or, maybe you found it, but [the original paint is too old to use](#) with any success. No matter—you can still get by matching what you need to a chip of paint.

Of course, that's not the only time that knowing how to match paint can come in handy. The same process also aids homeowners who are restoring an older home to its original glory, replicating a hue seen on Pinterest, and framing an entire

room's color scheme around a single a color in a painting or even a throw pillow.

Whatever your situation, there are several ways you can match paint to your desired color, even without knowing the paint's brand or name. While a 100-percent match is not always possible, these tricks should get you as close as possible to the intended shade that no one will notice the tiny discrepancy except for you.

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METHOD 1: Eyeball It

If an absolute match isn't critical, you might eyeball the paint options at the store and choose one that seems the closest to the color you want to match. Now, you're unlikely to use this method when trying to match existing paint in a highly visible area—say, where your living room gallery wall used to hang—but it's a perfectly acceptable option when you just want a color that comes close. For example, you might not need the precise robin's egg blue you saw painted in an adorable nursery or the exact shade of navy spotted on a painted buffet via Instagram (but it pays to pick up a swatch and hang it up on your soon-to-be accent wall or piece of furniture destined for painting to make sure you're happy with it before you start).



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METHOD 2: Paint Matching Apps

Many of the larger paint companies—including [Behr](#) and [Sherwin-Williams](#)—offer mobile apps to make paint matching a breeze. Each works a little differently, but the gist is the same: Download to your smartphone, snap a photo of the painted surface you want to match (in natural light, for best results), upload it to the app, and voila! You'll get that manufacturer's closest colors. Bonus: You'll even be able to preview recommended accent colors and design the perfect palette from <https://www.bobvila.com/articles/how-to-match-paint/>

able to prevent recommended decent colors and design the perfect palette from the comforts of your own home.

METHOD 3: Pull From a Fabric or Thread

Maybe you don't have a sample of paint, but you do have a swatch of fabric, a spool of thread, a favorite shirt, or a throw pillow in your desired color. Just bring this "sample" to your local paint store and let the technicians there use their color-matching wizardry to find the closest matching hue of paint. Just about every paint store has a spectrophotometer, which is a device that breaks down color into its various wavelengths, and then analyzes them to determine the exact combination of paint pigments needed to recreate the desired color. Then, the technician can match the findings to the closest color of that brand's paint.



Photo: istockphoto.com

METHOD 4: Take a Photo

Even without using a color app, go ahead and take a picture with your phone (again, while the object or room is illuminated with natural light) and bring that photo to your favorite paint store. They'll be able to match the color very closely with their in-store spectrophotometer. Keep in mind that, other than eyeballing, this is the option likeliest to be a little off, due to variations in color display on phone cameras. Still, if you're not dead-set on a perfect match, you should get satisfactory results.

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METHOD 5: Compare to Paint Chips

Want to match that pale yellow, bright blue, or stormy-sky-gray wall or furniture? Then head to your favorite paint store, and gather up a selection of paint chips close to the hue you are trying to match. Bring the chips home and hang them on the surface whose color you want to duplicate, then observe in multiple lights,

including daylight and lamplight. Whichever chip matches most closely is the winner.



Photo: amazon.com

METHOD 6: Enlist a Color Matcher

Once only within the budgets and skillsets of scientists, handheld color analyzers—one popular model is the Color Muse, which sells for around \$60 on [Amazon](#)—are now usable by anyone and within the budget of most do-it-yourselfers. These small gadgets, which work in tandem with an app, are quick and easy to use: Press the sensor against the colored item—be that painted wall, a swatch of fabric, even the surface of something more natural like a leaf—and the sensor does the rest. By isolating the color, it blocks all sources of external, ambient lighting (which varies throughout the day) and uses its own consistent internal light to get a precise read. Give it a minute, and you'll get an analysis of the color's makeup. Most of these devices, including the Color Muse, also allow you to compare colors, create palettes, and browse through "inspiration galleries" on the gadget's corresponding mobile app.

METHOD 7: Cut Your Own Sample

When all else fails and you need a perfect match for an already-painted wall, collect a sample to take to the paint store. Using a sharp utility blade, score a small square on a section of painted drywall that's not too terribly conspicuous. You'll need a chip that's at least one-inch square for the best results.

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At the paint store, staff will use their spectrophotometer to analyze the chip and match it to their brand's closest color. Be aware, however, that because most of the big-name brands of paint do their best to [avoid duplication by using proprietary formulations](#), you might not be able to get a 100-percent match, although you should be able to get close enough to fool just about any casual eye.

Once you have your new paint, remember to patch the spot where you took the sample. Use spackle to fill in any depressions or gouges, smooth it with a scraper or dull blade, and let it dry completely before painting the wall.

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