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Green decorating tip #2: Reduce wasted paint

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Leftover paint is a huge problem for municipalities all over this country. [The Product Stewardship Institute](#), a non-profit organization that is concerned with the life cycle of many different consumer products, reports that about 10 percent of the paint purchased in the U.S.—or about 65 million gallons annually—goes unused. The PSI also reports that leftover paint accounts for as much of 60 percent of the material collected at household hazard waste collection programs, which is a huge cost for local governments.

What can you do to reduce this burden? First of all, purchase only the paint that you are going to use. This will entail measuring your room so that you can give the dimensions to the paint store. The personnel there will tell you how much paint you will need, based on the dimensions as well as the hide and coverage of the paint.

If you have a considerable amount of paint left over after your painting project, consider using it to paint another small room in the house, such as the laundry room or a utility closet. Perhaps the color might even work on the ceiling of the room you are painting. Save a small amount in case you need to touch up the paint at a later date.

If you still have leftover paint, consider giving it away to family or friends. The [City of St. Louis Refuse Division](#) recommends reaching out to community groups that may appreciate a donation of paint, such as art departments at schools or colleges; organizations that provide housing or home improvement for low-income and elderly citizens; religious facilities; theater groups; and summer camps.

If you are unable to give away the paint, make sure you dispose of it properly. Latex paint can be disposed of with your regular trash, provided that you have removed the lid and allowed the paint to solidify. You can use kitty litter, sawdust or a commercial product like [Rock Miracle Waste Paint Hardener](#) to speed up the process. Leave the lid off the can when you throw it away, per the Refuse Division's website, so that your trash hauler can see that the paint has hardened.

Oil-based paint is considered a hazard household waste and should not be thrown away in the regular trash. For paint and other hazard household waste disposal (such as turpentine and paint thinners), the City of St. Louis Refuse Division recommends looking up "Hazardous Material Control and Removal" or "Waste Recycling and Disposal Service" in the Yellow Pages.

The St. Louis County Department of Health has conducted regular hazardous household waste collection events, collecting more than 1 million pounds of hazardous household waste materials in 2008 alone. Currently, the county health department is developing a network of permanent hazardous household waste drop-off locations to make it easier for more county residents to participate. Check the [Hazardous Household Waste Collection Program](#) page on the St. Louis County's website for updates.

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