12 ways to spray paint like the pros

Terms:
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Spray paint, when used right, is a quick and easy way to bring an old piece back to life. Spray paint is also great for covering objects that have corners or angles that can't be brushed easily.

Here are a dozen tips guaranteed to make your project look fabulous.

1. What are you painting?
Are you painting wood, plastic or metal? There are spray paints that are better suited for each surface. It’s important to know what surface you’re painting, so you can choose the appropriately formulated paint.

2. Prep, prep, prep
Remove any flaking paint before spray painting. Make sure the surface is as clean as possible. Sanding is recommended to smooth the surface, and remove rough spots. For very glossy surfaces, light sanding will de-gloss the surface for better adhesion. For best results, prime[1] the surface before you paint.

3. Beware of overspray
Tape off or cover any areas that you don’t want covered with overspray. Use a drop cloth to protect surrounding areas.

4. Spray safe!
It’s important to spray paint outdoors or in a well ventilated area, such as a garage. Avoid spraying in windy or dusty conditions. You can also turn a cardboard box on its side to create a handy spray booth[2].

5. Read the instructions
The instructions on the back of the label are valuable. They tell you how long to shake the can before spraying[3], how far to keep the can from the surface, the proper temperature at application, how long to wait before recoating and more.

6. Spray at a comfortable level
Avoid spray painting items on the floor. Try to spray your item on a workbench or some kind of platform. It will be easier to maneuver around the object and keep the spray pattern consistent.

7. Be kind to your fingers

8. Keep a wet edge
When spray painting, overlap about 50% of your previous stroke evenly and adjust your distance and speed while spraying to keep a wet edge. If you move the can too quickly or are too far away from your surface, you risk dry spraying.

9. Keep coats light and even
Spray paint in a steady back-and-forth motion, slightly overlapping each stroke. Spray in a sweeping motion[7] past the object from left to right to ensure even coverage. Apply two or more light coats a few minutes apart.

10. Avoid drips
Avoid drips, runs and sags by keeping the can the same distance from the surface and keep the can in motion while you spray paint. Don’t spray too close or too slowly. You’ll risk building up too much paint on the surface causing it to sag or run.

11. Round vs. flat surfaces
Painting round objects is easier if you are able to rotate it while spray painting[8]. A Lazy Susan or a piece of cardboard are good options. When spraying flat surfaces, lay the item flat, but make sure you have something to prop it up off of the table. This allows you to spray paint the bottom while keeping the object from sticking to the surface.

12. Pay attention to recoat time and cure time
The recoat time will tell you how long you can wait before applying a second coat. If you don't follow the instructions, the paint may wrinkle. Cure time is different than dry time. Paint might feel dry but that’s only superficial. The solid components in the paint need time to really stick together. That’s cure time. And that could take up to a week.