

Ten most common do-it-yourself mistakes

The standard rule for do-it-yourself projects is that they will take twice as long and cost three times as much as you expected. If it doesn't, it will probably take three times as long and cost twice as much.

Either way, the reason is the same. Do-it-yourselfers make mistakes. Lots of mistakes. The good news is that you can learn a lot from mistakes. The bad news is that mistakes always wind up making your home improvement project more expensive and more time-consuming than you wanted. Here are the top 10 do-it-yourself mistakes:

1. **Not taking out the required permits.** Considered a bother by many do-it-yourselfers, permits actually serve a greater purpose than just raising money for the government. For some jobs, such as putting in a wood stove, you need proof of the permit or your insurance carrier won't cover it. Not sure if your job requires a permit? You usually need one for anything larger than painting or papering walls. It doesn't hurt to call the building department and ask.
2. **Inadequate preparation.** Nothing slows down a job more than not having all the materials you need. If you are having materials delivered, you don't want them arriving out of order or exposed to weather while you're working on something else. Even worse, they could be stolen if they're not properly stored. If you have a septic tank, make sure you know where it is. If a heavy supply truck drives over it, you could be looking at a cracked tank.
3. **Skimping on materials.** Do-it-yourselfers sometimes use quarter-inch drywall for walls. You need at least five-eighths-inch; three-quarters-inch works well for a good sound barrier. The same rule applies to plywood for subfloors. Go with three-quarter-inch. It creates a much stronger floor, especially if you're installing tile floors over them.
4. **Using the wrong paint.** One of the most popular do-it-yourself projects around, painting can make a place look great. Flat paint, however, should be used only for ceilings, and interior paints should have at least an eggshell or satin finish so that you can easily scrub it without scrubbing it off. On outdoor decks, sun and rain tear the heck out of the wood. Clear sealers don't block the UV rays, and they peel. Use a linseed oil-based stain; it drives the pigment into the wood and preserves it.
5. **Improper preparation of walls for painting.** A good quality paint job is 90 percent preparation. Clean the walls, sand them, and patch any holes before you paint. A coat of primer or stain blocker should be applied if you're trying to cover over oil-based paint, stains, or peeling paint, or if you're painting a lighter color over a darker color.
6. **Unsafe job conditions.** Nothing diminishes your return on investment like a trip to the emergency room. Wear safety goggles when using power tools or working with drywall or wood. Wear hard hats when you're working under other people on scaffolding, and open some windows when you're painting, staining, or stripping old finishes off floors or walls. Do not wear loose, hanging clothing, especially when you're using power tools. Wear gloves when you're carrying wood, metal, and rock, or when hammering, and wear a nail or tool pouch to prevent damage to your floors and, more importantly, the feet of people and pets.
7. **Inaccuracy.** Measure twice, cut once. It's so important for things such as walls, drywall, baseboards, counter tops, and pipe. If you're going to err, err on the side of too long; it's always easier to make something shorter rather than longer. Spackle can cover up to an eighth of an inch seam. If the seam is a quarter of an inch or larger, the seam will pop the spackle and be visible.
8. **Working beyond your limits.** Everybody has them. Don't stand on the top steps of ladders, and don't try to work beyond your reach.
9. **Failure to get a clue.** You don't want to start to learn how to do a project on your own house. Work on someone else's house first! If you have a friend who is a contractor or an experienced do-it-yourselfer, offer your assistance on a project. No one will turn away free labor, even inexperienced free labor.
10. **Failure to get a clue, part 2.** If you need to remove a supporting wall, have an engineer look at it to see what kind of beam you need to replace it. If you have a saw in your hand and have a question about what you're doing, stop. Follow that little cautionary voice in your head.

