



Preparation for exterior painting: REPAIRING WOODEN TRIM PIECES

When you're preparing exterior surfaces for painting, you may find that you need to repair some rotted wood. For example, one of your windowsills may have rotted through. If you spot the problem early, you may be able to avoid replacing the whole sill. By using a wood hardener to restore firmness to the rotted surface and then filling in with wood putty, you can have a paintable surface quickly. Some companies make a series of products intended to work together (for example, Minwax™ Wood Hardener and its companion wood putty,) that will create a better bond than unrelated products. Once the putty has cured, you can sand or file it to duplicate the profile of the existing wood.

When can you repair a piece of wood trim, rather than replace it? For thinner pieces, you can use wood hardener and putty on small areas, so long as the entire piece retains its integrity. On thicker pieces, like a windowsill, there's an old carpenter's trick that can help you assess the extent of the damage. If you can push a nail or screwdriver into the wood, by hand, no more than 1/4", the surface can be repaired; if you can insert it more than 1/4", the trim piece is too rotted to be repaired, and should be replaced.

After you clean up the sanding dust from the surface, use an oil-based primer to seal the repaired area. (You'll get the best results if the wood has been dry for several days, and if the humidity is low on the day you paint.) After the primer has dried (read the directions on the can), use latex or oil-based paint for the finish coat. Bob Moore, who used to demonstrate paint products for a major hardware wholesaler, said that – so long as the surface is "clean, dry, dull, and smooth" – you can get paint to stick to nearly anything.