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Low toxic decorating for a natural home



Natural paints are a low toxic alternative and can still be pretty

© **earthBorn Paints**

The builders have packed up and the last paint brush has been cleaned, so why have you still got that renovating-induced headache? It could actually be that your new house is making you ill.

Indoor pollution levels can spike sharply during and after decorating, from the toxic off-gassing solvents and other materials release into the air. Happily, there are lots of ways to swap in greener, cleaner decorating products which can protect your health while you improve your home.

Edible paint

Some eco paint brands are so natural that you can actually eat them. Unlike their toxic synthetic cousins, which are officially classified as hazardous waste and need to be disposed of in special dumps, the remnants of these can be dried out and added to your compost heap. Natural paints are typically made of linseed oil, which has been used in paint-making for centuries, and performs the same hardening and drying role as plastics in conventional paints. Check out the excellent ranges at [Ieko](#) and [Earthborn](#). Unlike chemical-based paints, Eco Paint's solvent free [gloss paint](#) (£50.64) won't crack or peel. Wise up on how to choose the most eco-friendly paints in Lynn Edward and Julia Lawless's book [The Natural Paint Decorator](#) (£16.99) from The Green Shop.



EcoCentric's 'Pavilion' wallpaper uses safe, water-based inks

© EcoCentric

Wax oils for wood

You don't need industrial yacht varnish to protect your expensive hard wood flooring from stilettos tramping all over it. There are several entirely natural hard wax oils that offer resilient protection with no fear of bubbling or blistering, and will actually condition the wood with natural vegetable oils and waxes. Once treated, the floor can be kept in perfect condition without having to strip it back for renovation, necessary with most synthetic varnishes. Try Eco Shop's [transparent hard wax](#) (from £1.70) for furniture and wooden floors.

Chemical brothers

Some products aren't as natural as they seem, due to 'pre-treatments'. Tanalith (which contains arsenic) and Protim are common and highly toxic chemicals applied to wood to protect it from insect or fungus attacks. Over the last fifty years some incredibly toxic chemicals have been introduced into our homes and buildings in the cause of timber treatment, where an entirely natural product, like [linseed oil](#) (£3.45 for 500ml) from Godfrey's DIY, will do the job. If you are having new windows, doors or sills fitted, it's worth checking if the wood has been pre-treated.

Low toxic wallpaper

When it comes to pasting it up there's a simple recipe for a toxic-free paste at [Care2.com](#). If homemade paste is not an option for you, this low VOC [fungicide free wallpaper paste](#) (£4.11) is available from Urbane Living. When it comes to the wallpaper itself, choose those made with water-based inks or paints. [Farrow & Ball](#) have a great selection, and Graham & Brown has teamed up with talented students from Central St.Martins to launch eco-wallpapers that highlight environmental issues. We like their [rainforest](#) design (£25 per roll).

If you don't DIY...

An increasing number of contractors and one-man bands offer a full eco-friendly decorating service. They source and use all-natural low-VOC or toxic-free products and are experienced at the proper application

of the products they use, so all you have to worry about is the bill. Try [Garry Potter](#), [Pure Paint](#) or [Eco Decorator](#) for a quote.

Short cut materials

MDF, plywood, particleboard and pressed wood are increasingly popular DIY choices. Be aware that most of these composite materials are treated with formaldehyde, which is highly toxic and affects our neurological and immune systems. They can also still be 'off-gassing' (radiating toxins into the air) up to five years later. If you still want to use it then it's best to get it cut off-site at the wood merchants, and if possible sealed with a low VOC sealant before installation. The Forest Commission-backed site [Wood For Good](#) offers details of suppliers as well as tips for building with sustainable wood. Friends of the Earth's [Good Wood Guide](#) is another useful tool for basic tips on buying wood.

Give the world a chance - feed your eco hunger and read our guide to [reclaimed furniture](#) and [buying green wood](#).

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