

# Q&A

## Q. Fix for Peeling Stucco

*The painted finish on my client's recently purchased stucco house is blistering and peeling, and it's obvious that the traditional three-coat stucco underneath has been patched on several previous occasions (see photo, below). The stucco is applied over wood framing, but as is common in older houses, there is no weep screed; the stucco continues right past the bottom plate to the ground. What is causing the problem, and what's the best way to fix it?*



**A.** Ron Webber, a veteran plastering contractor in Orange, Calif., responds: I'd say you are dealing with efflorescence, which is caused by water from the soil wicking up into the stucco and then evaporating. Salts dissolved in the ground-water are left behind, resulting in a chalky residue and high alkalinity

that can weaken the stucco and interfere with top-coat adhesion. To fix the problem, you have to manage the water. For example, grading should be adjusted so that water flows away from the house, and sprinklers should be relocated so they don't spray on the walls.

Installing a weep screed around the bottom of the house a minimum 4 inches above grade (2 inches above paved surfaces) would also help to keep efflorescence at bay. To do this, you will have to remove all the stucco up to about a foot above grade, install the weep screed, install 60-minute — or better — building paper and lath, and patch in the stucco. It's a very slow process: Expect to

complete only 3 or 4 feet an hour, depending on how hard the stucco is. The risk is that your lather won't carefully chip back enough of the stucco and expose enough paper to be able to properly lap all of the layers. In some cases, you might find that the building paper has deteriorated or the metal lath has rusted away, in which case you'll have to remove all the stucco, lath, and building paper and start over again.

To prep the wall for stucco repair, dig back the dirt to below the bottom of the stucco wall. You may need to trench perpendicular to the wall so that later, when you rinse the walls, excess water can flow away. Next, scrape and brush away all the soft, loose, deteriorated paint and stucco until you get to the good hard stucco. Thoroughly rinse the exposed stucco with clean water. To dissolve the salts, scrub the walls with undiluted vinegar or a solution of 95 percent water and 5 percent muriatic acid. Use a long-handled brush and proper skin and eye protection. Try to keep the wall wet while you scrub; if it's a hot day, you'll need some help. Then thoroughly rinse again. To neutralize the acid, brush on a solution of one cup baking soda per 5 gallons of water, then thoroughly rinse one more time and allow the wall to dry completely.

When you patch the stucco, use an acrylic admix to enhance adhesion, density (watertightness), and flexibility. If you put admix in the base coat, add it to the finish coat as well. After the stucco has dried, spray the bottom 4 feet of the wall with a penetrating sealer before recoating with a paint specifically formulated for stucco.

## Q. Clearances for Outdoor Cookers

*My clients want to install a built-in high-Btu gas grill as part of a planned outdoor kitchen on the deck attached to their house. Can the cooker be placed under a protective overhang created by extending the existing roof?*

**A.** Mike Casey, a licensed plumbing and general contractor and ICC-certified building inspector, responds: When it comes to outdoor cooking areas, the IRC is not too specific about clearances, placement, and ventilation requirements for gas appliances except to advise that installations should follow the manufacturer's

instructions. Code is also a bit confusing regarding vertical clearance to combustibles above broiler and range units. For example, Section M1901 of the 2006 IRC requires 30 inches of vertical clearance for ranges, while Section M1505 requires a metal exhaust hood above an open-top broiler and at least 24 inches of vertical clearance to combustibles. No distinction is made between interior and exterior installations.

Manufacturers may have additional requirements. For example, Viking requires 6 inches of minimum clearance to combustible sidewalls for its built-in gas (propane or

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natural) outdoor range tops, wok/cookers, and grillers, and specifies that these models can't be placed "under an overhead that is unprotected and combustible." In my opinion, this would clearly rule out the kind of installation you describe, but your local building official might allow it if the combustible material is protected and other clearance requirements are met,

or if a noncombustible hood is installed above the appliance.

My recommendation is to research the style and brand to be installed, consult the installation instructions for specific clearances and location restrictions, and then contact your local building official for an interpretation as to where and how the unit can be installed.

### Q. Can Vinyl Siding Be Painted?

*As part of a remodel, my clients want to change the color of their vinyl-sided house. Can we side the new addition in the color they want and then simply paint the existing siding to match?*

**A.** Debbie Zimmer, director of the Rohm and Haas Paint Quality Institute in Spring House, Pa., responds: While the Vinyl Siding Institute Web site ([vinylsiding.org](http://vinylsiding.org)) warns that many manufacturers will void their warranties if their vinyl siding is painted, our long-term testing here at the Paint Quality Institute ([paintquality.com](http://paintquality.com)) confirms that painted vinyl siding performs very well as long as you follow a few simple guidelines.

Before painting, be sure to treat any mildew with a 3-to-1 water-household bleach solution, leaving it on the siding for at least 20 minutes and adding more solution as it dries (be sure to wear eye and skin protection). When rinsing off the bleach solution, use detergent and water and scrub as needed to remove any dirt or

chalk from the siding. Finally, rinse thoroughly again and allow the siding to completely dry before applying paint.

Another option for cleaning the siding is careful power-washing.

Priming isn't necessary, as long as you've completely removed the mildew, dirt, and chalk. To paint the siding, use a top-of-the-line exterior 100 percent acrylic latex house paint. A flat finish will hide variations and irregularities in the siding better than a glossier satin finish, and you'll get the best results if you spray rather than brush the paint.

Most paint makers advise against painting vinyl siding a color darker than its original hue. This is because darker colors have a lower light reflectance value (or LRV) and absorb more light — and therefore heat — than lighter colors with higher LRVs, which can cause "oil canning," or warping of the siding. But some manufacturers are now developing formulations that will allow darker colored paints with low LRVs to be applied over lighter-colored vinyl siding and composite trim products.

### GOT A QUESTION?

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