

Required Steps For Successful Painted Utility Boxes

Prep Is Crucial!

1. Scrape off rough, peeling paint
2. Sand off rust and sand entire box lightly to rough up surface with steel wool or medium grit sandpaper
3. Wash off dirt and sanding residue.
4. Protect around the base of the box with plastic or paper to avoid drips.
5. TWO COATS OF PRIMER! Cover the entire box, including the top. Get all crevices above and below - water will cause rust and peeling. Use regular acrylic gesso thinned to the consistency of heavy cream.
6. NOTE: if repainting a previously painted utility box that is peeling, prime with Kilz instead of gesso— 1-2 coats, especially where rusty. First try to chip off any peeling paint that is already separating from the box. Then proceed with the rest of the steps below.
7. Paint two coats of the background color over the entire box. Use LIGHTFAST, good quality acrylic paints. Fluorescent colors will fade. Liquitex, Golden, Winsor & Newton are reliable brands. For the background, you can mix acrylic paints into a good quality exterior latex base color. You need at least a quart to cover the entire box. *Do not use white as a background color – it yellows.
8. Transfer your design onto the background color using a grid, stencils, etc. and paint at least two coats of the design colors so that the paint is opaque, not streaky.
9. Make sure to sign the box and credit the Belmont Art Association and any other sponsors when finished with your design.
10. When the paint is dry, apply 2 coats of good quality non-yellowing exterior polyurethane varnish. Get in all the crevices!
11. After the varnish has dried and cured, apply anti-graffiti top coat. This product can be expensive. Artists usually share the cost of this varnish.
12. IMPORTANT: This project likely will require several separate work sessions. Before you begin work again after a break, you will need to wash dirt and grime off the box so that the paint layers will not have inclusions that lead to earlier breakdown of the work.
13. KEEP AN EYE ON THE WEATHER FORECAST! Do not do a painting session a few hours before heavy rain is predicted. The paint needs time to dry and cure beyond feeling dry to the touch. Thicker areas of paint are especially susceptible to water damage such as dripping or pockmarks.

Liz LaManche Techniques:

The two boxes were done using different materials.

First, surface prep for both: washing with water and a mild cleaner and a rag to get any dust and dirt off, sanding using a medium grit sandpaper to remove the shine from the existing paint so the new paint layers would have a "toothier" surface to adhere to. Wipe again with a damp cloth to remove any dust from the sanded surface. Note, the surface prep alone took a good 4 hours per box and a fair amount of elbow grease.

Flowers Box:

This was done in spray paint with custom-cut stencils.

It was primed in a Rustoleum light grey metal primer and painted with mostly Montana Gold outdoor-rated low-pressure spray paints, sealed with a coat of their clear varnish before using the suggested varnish over the top. I had to be careful of airborne dust and particles, and wipe often between coats to make sure there were no unwelcome inclusions. Spray paints take practice to handle, but artist/graffiti paints have good outdoor colorfastness and durability.

Persian Carpet Box:

This was primed with Zinsser or Kilz primer and painted with artist acrylics. All the colors were chosen to be Lightfastness 1 series. This decreases your color choices some but will help with the longevity of the piece. The good brands I use that are easily available are Nova Color (mail order), and Golden, which now I believe has a specific line for outdoor murals. Use heavy body acrylics and thin with GAC 200 (hard acrylic medium extender), not too much water as watering down can change the surface's curing and durability. Several thin coats create a harder surface than one thick coat, and definitely avoid drips and puddling. You do need at least 2 coats with most colors to get decent coverage (a Varnish with same-brand UV protective gloss varnish).