

Do It Yourself

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Removing Wallpaper

From "[Ask DIY](#)"

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Q: There's some old wallpaper that came with the house I just bought, and it's about as ugly as wallpaper comes. I'd love some tips on removing it so I don't remove the wall with it.

A: (Brad Staggs, *Ask DIY Home Repair*) There are a lot of different ways to get wallpaper off and a variety of products you can use (**figure A**). But what you're essentially trying to do is to deactivate the adhesive that holds the paper backing onto the wall. Here's how to proceed:

Materials:

Paper Tiger wallpaper-perforating tool

Gel wallpaper-removal solvent, or warm water mixed with vinegar in a spray bottle

Scraping tool

Drop cloth

Safety glasses

Protective gloves such as latex

Safety alert: Always wear safety glasses when working with solvents on a wall, and if you have sensitive skin, wear gloves (but not latex gloves if that's what you're sensitive to!).

1. Remove the face plates on the walls you'll be working with, and cover the outlets with electric tape to protect them from liquids (**figure B**). Also put a drop cloth down to protect the carpet or floors.
2. If you're lucky, some paper may already be loose, and you can just start peeling. Otherwise, consider using a gadget known as the Paper Tiger (**figure C**). It's a roller, on the underside of which are little teeth that will perforate the wallpaper (**figure D**). That allows any solvent you use to get behind the paper and dissolve the adhesive more readily.



Gadgets and gels can help remove wallpaper, but mostly you'll need hard work and patience.



Figure A



Figure B

Nobody's perfect: Be careful not to gouge the wall behind the paper with any perforating or scraping tools. If you do perforate the wall, fill the nicks with spackle.

3. Apply the gel or other commercial solvent with a paintbrush, and give it some time to soak in and loosen the wallpaper (the label should specify how long).



Figure C

Working smarter: A less expensive solvent option is warm water mixed with a few tablespoons of vinegar in a spray bottle.

4. After the solvent has a chance to soak in, start working at removal at a seam or edge of a perforation, scraping with a Paper Scraper, plastic spatula, plastic putty knife or drywall knife.



Figure D

5. Keep applying the solvent and scraping until all the wallpaper is gone.

More questions for Brad:

Q: I don't want to remove my wallpaper. I want to take the easy way out and just paint over it. Bad idea?

A: I don't recommend painting over wallpaper, particularly the vinyl type. You really just need to bite the bullet and take the old wallpaper off.

Q: Is there a trick when you're hanging wallpaper to make it look seamless?

A: If you're working with a wallpaper that has a pattern, make sure to take the extra time to match up the pattern.

Q: How do you clean wallpaper to make it look new?

A: On washable wallpaper you can use soap and water and a sponge. But the more expensive wallpaper gets, the more likely it is to be made only with paper and without the vinyl overlay. You can't use cleansers or water on that type, so you're left with just trying to be real careful not to spill things on the wall.

Book:

Complete Guide to Wallpapering
by David Groff and Mike McGlintook
Creative Homeowner Press (1999)
24 Park Way

Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458-0038

Phone: 201-934-7100

Fax: 201-934-8971

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