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7 eco-painting tips So, now that paint is healthier than ever, here are some of the best tips and hints to help pretty up your home, with a little help from the experts.

1. Lead savvy Most people know about the negative health effects of lead. Before painting, it's important to know that in 1970, house paint was limited to just one per cent lead content. However, higher-level lead house paint has survived in some old houses. When the paint is in good condition or covered by lead-free paint it's safe, but it becomes a concern when it's chipping or undergoing renovations. Chipping paint disperses lead around the home and garden, and renovations risk creating lead dust that can be inhaled. Information on the safe handling of lead paint is available on the Product Safety Australia website. Those with young children need to be aware that old hand-me-down furniture such as cots and baby chairs can have lead paint. Also, young kids are at just the right height to get in close contact with skirting boards, cupboards and chair or table legs – and they're likely to get their gums or teeth on these if they're at the age of teething, or just trouble-making.

2. Go DIY or pro? Deb Preston from Painted Earth, a paint store in Byron that specialises in non-toxic eco friendly paints and finishes, says that "DIY is certainly possible with these paints, and in fact much more enjoyable because you are not breathing in toxic fumes". "However we would still recommend hiring a professional for large paint jobs. A professional painter with all their gear and experience can work much faster, do a better job, and use less paint than the average DIY. They can also purchase the paint at trade price. Hence the savings stack up on the side of going pro for big jobs." Wurm adds that it's worth going to specialist paint stores; "they will have those zero-VOC paints I mentioned before – that's where the best range of low- and zero-VOC paints are". "In the big barns, you'll get dirt-cheap paint that's poor quality, but these eco-friendly paints are much the same price as what you would pay for good-quality paint from any of the big barns," says Wurm. "We always recommend choosing good-quality paint because it lasts longer – so if you're going to pay that amount of money,

why wouldn't you choose an eco-friendly paint that's also good quality, and isn't harmful to your family?" For those planning to go DIY, think carefully about the quantity of paint needed. Most paint companies have paint calculators on their websites, but consulting an expert in person will give a better estimate. If you have leftover paint, save a little (see the 'Keepsakes' tip below), and dispose of the rest thoughtfully. Some landfills and tips will take paint, but it's often burnt there, so it's best to donate leftovers to schools, social welfare centres or other community organisations. "I would recommend that people use a qualified painter, because even though the TV shows make it look as though painting is something that anyone can do, the reality is that thousands of people attempt to paint their house, don't get it right, and then they have to call in a professional to fix all the problems."

3. Beware of asbestos Part of the reason that Wurm and Preston generally recommend getting a professional painter is, even with the healthier paints that are now available, there are other health concerns to be aware of when renovating – in particular, asbestos. "If you don't know what asbestos looks like – and most people don't – then you could be sanding asbestos in your house," he says. "Any house that was built before 1989 could have asbestos in it, and any house that was built before 1970 could have lead paint. There are special procedures to follow in these cases. A painter who's qualified and trained will be able to tell whether you've got asbestos or lead paint, and ensure that it's treated properly." 4. Removing old paint To remove old paint, there are a couple of different methods. Most people sand, blast or scrape off the old paint before applying a new layer. There's a product that improves the safety of this process; the Livos TAKETI paint stripper. Other removal methods disperse toxic particles of paint into the air, and these can stay in the carpet and soft furnishings of your home for years. When the Livos paint stripper is applied, it forms a thick, sticky layer that is then wiped off. All of the ingredients in the product come from environmentally sound sources. If you decide to use this product, be sure to follow the instructions carefully, including ensuring you wear proper gloves and eye protection. 5. Apply in a system "Paint needs to be applied in a system. So you have primers, undercoats and topcoats. If people try to cut corners and just slap it on without following the system, the paint is not going to last," says Wurm. Another mistake people make is adding water to paint to thin it out and help it 'go further'. This means the paint won't last as long, ruining the long-term durability so a whole new job will have to be done sooner. "Pretty much all of the problems that people have with paint has got nothing to do with the paint. The problem is if it hasn't been applied in accordance with the manufacturer's directions." For those being bold and going DIY, Masters Paint Buyer David Ryan has a tip for storing paint brushes while you're on your project. "When taking a short break from painting, a great way to keep your rollers and brushes fresh is to wrap them in cling film. This will keep the paint moist and stop your rollers and brushes from drying out. At the end of the day, rinse the brushes in water if using water-based paint, or clean them with turps if using oil-based paint, wrap them in cling film again and they will be ready to use again the next day." 6. Top gear The brand Monarch has some environmentally friendly tools for painting, available at the Australian Brushware Corp. There's a drop sheet from 100 per cent recycled plastic, bamboo brushes made with recycled tin, and a tray and roller kit made from wool and recycled materials. 7. Keepsakes Whether you're going DIY or getting a professional, a good idea is to keep some paint on hand for touch-ups – this is better than having to do a whole new job for a couple of chips or marks. Preston says, "to keep leftover paint, make sure you don't contaminate it by dipping your brush into it – pour out what you are going to paint with into a separate container. Exclude all air with a layer of cling film on the top of the paint before closing the lid, and keep it in a place that is not exposed to extreme heat or cold. Paint will generally keep for several years. -

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