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## Hints to help caulking go smoothly

By Jim Hurley



Jim Hurley is an independent handyman with over 25 years of experience in residential repairs. Hopefully this free advice is helpful to someone attempting Do-It-Yourself home repairs. The information presented is intended for informational purposes and for use by persons having appropriate technical skill, at their own discretion and risk.

Next, choose the right caulk: You have two choices, Silicone or Latex caulk.

Use 100% Silicone caulk for areas that need a 100% waterproof seal; bathroom tubs and tile, kitchen counter tops and backsplashes, and gaps around sinks and counters are prime examples. The one thing to remember is that 100% Silicone caulk cannot be painted. Paint just beads up and runs off Silicone caulk. Silicone caulk comes in a few colors. Besides clear and white, you can find black, tan or almond at better hardware suppliers. Silicone caulk is challenging because it requires mineral spirits (paint thinner) to clean up any excess. Be sure to have some paint thinner and disposable rags on hand. Wrap the thinner rags in newspaper and seal them airtight in a baggie for disposal. Let's not have any spontaneous combustion.

For projects next to a wall or trim that requires paint, use Latex caulk. I use Latex caulk around doors, windows, baseboards and for small cracks in walls. I love this caulk because it is water soluble for cleanup. It is also paintable, so color does not matter as much, but it does come in clear or white.

Purchase a good caulking gun. With the cheaper guns you must remember to release the piston whenever you set the gun down. Better caulk guns come with a little spring-loaded tab which will release that pressure without having to reset the piston.

Applying the caulk: Here we go with the artistic part. When I was a beginner, it seemed like the caulk would randomly squirt out of the gun and smear itself all over me. Before you start caulking, be sure you have clear access to the area. Nothing spoils a line of caulk like bumping into things as you move the gun down the line.

You want to cut the tip of the caulking tube at an angle so that the caulk comes out of the tube in a flat line. You also want to cut open the tip just enough to give you the size of line you need. Cut off a big chunk if you need to fill big gaps, cut off a small amount if you just need a thin line. Be prepared to waste caulk. Lay down the line of caulk and use your finger to gently smooth the line. Wipe the excess caulk off your finger frequently to minimize clean up on the surface.

Bottom line: Caulk is cheap! That tube you've been saving for years in the garage, (especially if it was opened), is probably not going to work as well as a new tube that costs around \$5. Be sure to use fresh caulk.

That's about all the info I can share. I love a smooth, clean line of caulk but it takes care and effort to

Have you ever watched an artist work? I mean closely watch as they prepare the palette, carefully mix the color they need and then apply it so beautifully to their canvas in a smooth fluid stroke of the brush. Yeah, I can't do that. My real talent seems to be demolition, tearing out the wall of a room or removing tile floors. But, as a professional handyman, I am sometimes called upon to create a beautiful finish as well as smash things. That is where my love/hate relationship with caulking begins.

New construction ends with a perfect finish where there are no gaps or cracks in new tile or along the trim moulding. Over time though, things do move and shift and little cracks appear. One of the most frequent items on the "Handyman To-Do" list in homes is caulking. Caulking for the shower, around the tub, around the sink, or gaps around the house can be a DIY item for you, provided you want to try it. Here's what you need to know. Warning: there are some supplies to buy and it will take time.

First prepare the surface: Use a razor knife to cut away old caulking. A painter's tool or putty knife can also scrape off excess caulk. On tile or counter tops, a one-sided, safety razor blade (in the paint department of the hardware store) will also work to remove old caulk. After scraping away the old caulk, clean the surface with acetone to remove any remaining residue. The time and care you take to prepare the area is directly proportionate to the quality of your finish.

achieve that. As with learning any new skill, be prepared to have some adventures with lots of restarts, you will improve with practice. Don't be afraid to try though, it all cleans up in the end and you can check a project off your to-do list.

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