



Removing Wallpaper

Identify Your Wall Type

It is important to know what kind of walls you have before you begin. The age of the wall usually determines whether it is drywall or plaster.

Plaster walls are found mostly in homes that are more than 50 years old. In plaster walls, wood lath is nailed to wood-framed walls and covered with two or three coats of [plaster](#). These walls are more solid and sound dull if you knock on them.

Drywall has been used in homes for the past 50 years or so. Drywall is a sheet of chalk-like substance covered with a lightweight cardboard. These sheets are nailed over wood-framed walls and have a hollow sound when you knock on them. Drywall is more delicate than plaster, so be careful not to damage the cardboard facing when using a [wallpaper scraping](#) tool.

A Little Prep Work

Before you start to work, you will need to prepare your room. Follow these steps:

- Take everything off the walls.
- Remove decorative objects and knickknacks.
- Remove as much furniture as possible. Cover what is left.
- Place old [towels](#) along the baseboards. Spread plastic [dropcloths](#) over the towels and tape them to the baseboards. This step will prevent messy scraps from getting on your floors.
- Allow a full day for removing paper from an average-sized room.

Strippable Wallpaper

Newer wallpapers are strippable, which means they can easily be removed without water or chemicals. If you know the wallpaper you are trying to remove was hung in recent years, you may be in luck. Here is how to check:

- At a corner or seam near the bottom of the wall, use a [putty knife](#) to pry the edge of the wallcovering. If it pulls away easily and keeps coming up as you pull, you have strippable wallpaper and your job should be easy.
- To remove the paper, simply grab the lower corner of a strip and pull it away until both corners of the strip are free. Then hold the bottom edge with both hands and pull until the whole strip is off the wall. Repeat all the way around the room.
- If the paper is stubborn, you can help it along by using a [razor knife](#). Hold the knife perpendicular to the wall and make a series of horizontal strips about 10" apart. Then loosen the section of paper and pull it free with your fingers.

If the Cardboard Facing Comes Off the Wall

If you are removing strippable wallpaper and the paper surface of your drywall comes up too, **stop immediately**.

When this happens, it generally means that the drywall was not sealed with enough paint. [Glue](#) down any loose pieces and

seams that have separated. Fill in uneven areas with non-shrinking [spackling](#) compound. Sand your repairs and apply an oil-based [sealer](#) with an [enamel undercoat](#).

Peelable Wallpaper

Some wallpapers are peelable, which means that they have a top coat which comes off just like strippable paper. Once you have peeled off the top vinyl coat, you will have the backing left. Follow directions for stripping with water to remove the backing. Do not leave the backing on, even if it is in good condition.

Washable Wallpaper

The surface that makes washable wallpaper easy to clean also makes it a little harder to remove. You must break through the plastic film that covers the paper in order for water to penetrate the paper. Use a [scoring tool](#) to create holes in the wallpaper. Soak the paper with water from a [spray bottle](#). Spray water into the slits so it can work its way behind the covering. Wait about 10 minutes and then scrape off the paper with a putty knife.

Stripping with Water

For this job, you need a [liquid stripper concentrate](#). Mix with hot water according to the manufacturer's directions. Apply the mixture to your walls with a broad brush or a sprayer. Work from top to bottom a section at a time. Do not try to tackle such a large area that the paper dries before you have a chance to remove it.

Let the paper soak for a few minutes; then start stripping it away with a [scraper](#).

Sometimes, you will find old paper that just will not absorb water. When this happens, scuff the surface with coarse [sandpaper](#) or a scoring tool to allow the water to soak into the paper. Once it is thoroughly soaked, apply the wetting agent twice more and let it soak for 30 minutes. You will know it is ready when you can scrape off pieces with your fingernail.

Remember to wear [gloves](#) and [goggles](#) since you are dealing with chemicals.

Steam Removal

The last resort for removing wallpaper is to steam-strip. This job is strenuous because you must steam and strip at the same time. You might want to ask a friend for help.

A [steamer](#) uses boiling water to soften the glue between the wallpaper and the wall. If you are removing vinyl-coated wallpaper with a steamer, you still have to use a scoring tool to punch holes in the paper so the steam can reach the glue.

Rent a steamer instead of purchasing one since this is not a job you will do very often. Carefully read the manufacturer's directions, as they may vary from machine to machine. Basically, the process works this way:

- Make sure the power is off.
- Pour warm water into the reservoir.
- Turn on the machine and wait for the water to boil.
- With your goggles and gloves on, place the stripper's steam pad firmly on the wallpaper for about 30 seconds. Move the pad and you should see loose paper. Remove the paper with a scraper.