

"Popcorn ceilings"

They "popped" up in the nineteen sixties and were "pop"ular with contractors and homeowners alike. Being sprayed on in one application and not requiring paint, they were an economical alternative to smooth plaster ceilings and they provided a new modern look.

Just as shag carpeting came and went, it seems the popcorn ceiling's days are numbered. Increasingly home buyers are electing to remove the dust collecting cover and replace it with a smooth or textured trowel finish. Here's what you need to know to do it yourself.

First and foremost, if your home was built before 1973 your popcorn ceiling probably contains asbestos and must be removed by a licensed asbestos abatement contractor also, the ceilings may have been painted with a lead based paint; have the ceilings tested for asbestos and lead before you proceed.

Once you're sure the popcorn is safe to remove, assemble the following tools; role of plastic, 6in. or 8in. putty knife, spray bottle with water, dust mask and eye protection.

Remove all the furniture and cover the entire floor with plastic. If the ceiling has never been painted, spray an area of the ceiling with water and simply peel the material off with the putty knife (wetting the ceiling reduces dust and clean-up time). If the ceilings have been painted the water will not penetrate the paint and you're going to get dirty. Remember to turn the air conditioner off as this will pull dust out of the room and deposit it in the entire house.

The application of a popcorn ceiling eliminates several steps required to make a smooth ceiling. Once you've removed the popcorn ceiling you'll be left with bare sheet rock and minimally taped joints. To smooth the ceiling it will be necessary to apply a thin coat of tape joint compound over the joints with a 6in. putty knife. Use joint compound to also fill the depressions from the nail or screw holes. Use the joint compound sparingly because it is faster to make two thin applications than to over fill the holes, which would then require a lot of extra sanding later.

Once the joint compound is dry it will require sanding. Instead of using sandpaper, use sanding mesh, which is designed to go on a sanding pad attached to the end of a long pole. This way you can conveniently sand the ceiling without having to climb back up on the ladder. Don't forget your eye protection and dust mask.

The secret of sanding joint compound is to take off just the high ridges. The low spots can then be filled with another coat of joint compound. Depending on your personal preference, complete the project with either a final coat of paint or texture the ceiling to match the walls. Either choice will look nice and add equity to your home.