

Popcorn Ceiling Options

If you have popcorn ceilings in your home, then you are in good company. Installing popcorn ceilings was very common in new homes in the 70's and 80's. It also became routine for remodelers to apply popcorn ceilings over existing, damaged ceilings in older homes.

Today, not only do popcorn ceilings make a home look dated, they are also easily damaged, stained and are difficult to keep clean. Love 'em or hate 'em, this article will give you options for removing or maintaining your popcorn ceilings.

Important

Before you begin, it is important to have a portion of your ceiling tested for asbestos. Asbestos in popcorn ceilings was banned in 1978. However, some construction companies had asbestos containing materials stockpiled and used it, well into the 1980s. If your home was built prior to 1980, there is a 50% chance that your popcorn ceiling contains asbestos. Though newer homes (1990s – present) are not likely to contain asbestos, there is always the possibility of subgrade materials making it on to the market. Therefore, the risk of asbestos can never be completely ruled out. Even today, asbestos is routinely used in building materials manufactured in countries without adequate regulations. Occasionally, these products make it onto the U.S. market and are used in new construction. As we learned from the contaminated pet food recalls, consumers should never take it for granted that something is safe and always be mindful of how a product is being used and the potential risks that could be associated.

Local asbestos testing and abatement companies will conduct a test on a small sample of your ceiling for around \$20. If testing shows that your ceiling contains asbestos, you should not take further steps to remove the ceiling. Check with local air quality agencies or professional abatement companies for options on removing a ceiling containing asbestos.

In the Kansas City area

Asbestos Consulting and Testing (ACT)
14953 W. 101 Terrace
Lenexa, KS 66215
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Removing a Popcorn Ceiling

1. This will be a messy process so cover everything that is to remain in the room. Cover the floor with drop cloths or plastic and tape the edges to your baseboards to keep them from moving when you are walking on them. Cover furniture and other items with thin plastic. Cleanup is easy if you simply roll up your plastic and throw it away. Wearing a hat facilitates your own clean-up and a hat with a bill keeps particles out of your eyes which is especially important for contact wearers.
2. Turn off the power to your ceiling lights at your panel box.
3. Plan to work on areas about 4'x4' at a time. Use a piece of cardboard to block water from spraying on the top of the walls around the perimeter of the room.
4. Use a garden sprayer and fill it with warm water. Add about a teaspoon of dish soap and 1/4 cup of ammonia (or vinegar) per gallon of water. Pump it up and begin spraying a 4'x4' square on the ceiling. The popcorn absorbs water well, so spray it evenly until it begins to change color. Do not overly soak the popcorn! Let the water soak in and if you see spots that haven't changed color, spray them again. After a few minutes, use a small putty knife (4" or smaller) to scrape a small section. If the popcorn comes off cleanly, down to the wallboard, then proceed to step five. If not, then lightly re-spray the area and wait a little longer. Depending on the temperature and humidity in the room, the amount of water and time will vary.

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5. Use a 10-14" tapping knife and begin scraping the popcorn from the ceiling. Be careful not to gouge the ceiling with the corners of the knife. You can use a cardboard box to catch some of the falling popcorn and minimize cleanup later.
6. When you are finished removing the popcorn, step back and let the ceiling dry. Then you can remove any left over spots by repeating the procedure. If the ceiling was painted before the popcorn was applied then it will be easy to see when the removal is complete. If it was not painted, then keep in mind that there will be areas of joint compound that you will not want to remove, e.g., edges that meet the walls, joints between sheetrock panels.
7. Let the ceiling completely dry overnight when you're done with the removal.
8. Use a wet rag to wipe down any left over residue. Smooth out joints and fill gouges and cracks with joint compound or spackle.
9. Prime the ceiling before painting or applying texture.

Patching Damaged Popcorn

1. To patch a portion of your popcorn ceiling that is failing, remove all loose or fallen popcorn with a putty knife.
2. Using a garden sprayer, or spray bottle, moisten about 12" of the ceiling surrounding the bad spot. Allow the water to soak in and remove 8-10" of the popcorn all the way around the spot.
3. To patch it, you can try a can of spray texture or you can rent a hopper/compressor and mix your own texture. Spray the texture on a piece of scrap cardboard until you've matched your existing ceiling. Then apply the spray to the area to be patched, feathering it into the existing ceiling. Do not spray the patch too heavily or it will not adhere to the ceiling. Spray a second coat if needed to build the patch up to match the existing ceiling.
4. Allow the patch to dry overnight.
5. If you find that the patch blends into the existing ceiling, you are done. If the color of the patch does not match the surrounding ceiling, you will have to prime and paint the ceiling with a flat ceiling paint.

Covering a Ceiling Stain

1. If the stain is more of a discoloration rather than a substance that has adhered to the ceiling, then it might be possible to remove it with 1:6 mixture of bleach and water. Depending on the size of the stain, the bleach mixture can be applied with something as small as a cotton swab for tiny areas up to a spray bottle for large areas. Keep in mind that bleach will permanently damage clothing, upholstery and carpet, so prep accordingly.
2. A more stubborn ceiling stain will require treatment to prevent it from leaching through paint. Prime the entire spot with an oil-based primer. Kilz upshot primer is a product designed for this type of application. Just mask the surrounding area and spray the spot. Make sure you've covered the entire spot enough to hide the discoloration and feather the spray onto the ceiling around the stain.
3. Allow the primer to dry and determine whether the touchup is acceptable as is. Many times the white primer is close enough in color to the ceiling that no further work is needed. If the primed spot does not match the surrounding ceiling, you can touch up the area with the original paint or you will need to paint the entire ceiling with a flat ceiling paint.
4. To paint a popcorn ceiling with a roller, apply the paint to the ceiling by rolling in one direction. If you overwork the texture, or apply too much paint, the popcorn may absorb the moisture from the paint and release from the ceiling.

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Covering a Popcorn Ceiling Containing Asbestos

1. You do not have to remove a popcorn ceiling that contains asbestos. Asbestos is dangerous when it is considered friable (brittle or readily crumbled). One way to protect your home and its occupants is to contain the asbestos by installing sheetrock over the popcorn, preventing the particles from becoming airborne.
2. You can install sheetrock as thin as ¼" since this is a cosmetic repair and not the actual ceiling itself. See our articles "Sheetrocking Purchasing Your Materials", "Cutting and Hanging Sheetrock" and "Mudding and Taping Sheetrock" for more information on how to install and finish sheetrock.