

BASIC LIMEWASH

Jane Schofield

37 Spital Square, London E1 6DY: 071 377 1644

THE ADVANTAGES

1. Most old buildings (pre 1850 or so) were built and maintained with lime throughout and limewash works well and sympathetically with them. It is particularly suitable for all limestones, lime renders & plasters, wattle and daub, cob buildings etc.
2. Limewash allows a building to "breathe" so that any damp which may be present is evaporated away harmlessly and not trapped in the wall to cause problems. Limewash also helps to eliminate condensation.
3. Limewash has a very matt finish, and helps to consolidate and improve the surface of old plaster etc, both physically and visually. It can be made in beautiful colours, and unlike many modern products, it looks even better as it ages. If carefully and properly made, limewash will not brush off onto clothes etc.
4. Limewash is cheap.

THE DISADVANTAGES

1. Making limewash is not as easy as taking the lid off a tin of shop paint.
2. Limewash is unsuitable for hard cement renders, hard modern bricks, or other impervious surfaces e.g. flint. Amateurs would be ill-advised to limewash sandstone unless it has been successfully limewashed before.
3. It can be difficult to match coloured limewash batches. Some pigments in coloured limewash may darken or fade when affected by the weather. (This may actually look very good.)
4. Limewashing does not work as well in very quick-drying conditions.

MATERIALS

(for suppliers, see page 4)



THIS MATERIAL IS HIGHLY CAUSTIC IN THE PRESENCE OF MOISTURE. Protect eyes, hands etc. at all times. Do not store in a damp place or spontaneous combustion can occur. Keep away from children etc.

This will make a long-lasting & top-quality limewash for external and internal use.

(Sometimes called Lumplime or Burnt lime)



TALLOW

A hard clarified animal fat.

Used in conjunction with quick lime, a small amount of tallow will make an external limewash which will shed some rainwater in exposed conditions.

Unnecessary for internal use.



This is the consistency of toothpaste, but is caustic enough to sting the eyes and roughen the skin. May be stored safely and improves with age.

This is the safest and simplest way to make a good quality limewash.



RAW UNSEED OIL

Used in conjunction with putty- or bag-lime to improve water-shedding properties of external limewash.

Unnecessary for internal use.



This comes in powder form and is an inferior material. Tends to cake if stored in a damp place.

This will make a poor quality limewash with a short life, and a tendency to brush off.



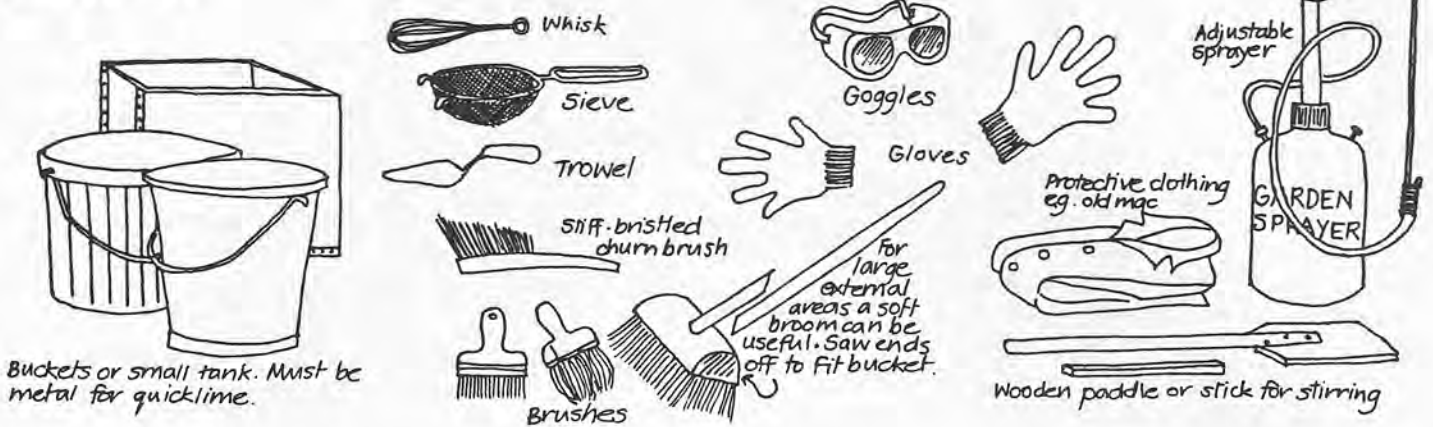
PIGMENTS

Artists pigments are the most expensive, but very good colours.

Other pigments are much less expensive. Some are good colours, some awful. Trial mixes are a good idea.

Raddle (sheep dyes) are effective (internally at least) and come in various colours.

EQUIPMENT

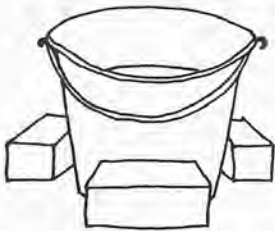


MAKING LIMEWASH WITH QUICKLIME

(all quantities are approximate)

1. Assemble all tools, materials and equipment. Have water near at hand. Keep unprotected onlookers at least 15' away. Put on protective clothing and goggles.

2.



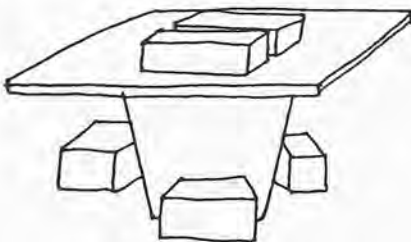
Prop a large rustproof metal bucket or small tank securely with bricks or stones. Fill half full with hot water. Add approx. 1 pint volume of quicklime, and an egg-sized lump of tallow shredded (if limewash is to be used externally.)

3.



Stand back and allow the mixture to boil furiously until it settles down a bit. Use the paddle to scrape up any lime which has caked at the bottom. If the mixture becomes too thick to stir, then a little more water may be added.

4.



When slaking is completed and all bubbling has ceased, cover the bucket securely and leave to cool.

Now follow instructions for limewash from putty lime.

LIMEWASH FROM PUTTY LIME

5.



If colour is to be used, then mix some pigment with a little hot water in a screw-topped jar, shake well & set aside to stand. The colour will then mix more easily into the limewash.

6.



(If home-staked lime is runny, then go straight on to stage 7.) Place about 3 trowelfuls of lime putty into a bucket with a few inches of water and work to a smooth paste with the whisk. Add more water until the mixture is like thin cream.

If using bag lime, mix the water into the lime gradually, beating well to get as thorough a mix as possible. This is better if it is kept, covered, for 2 or 3 days at this stage.

(For external limewash made with bought putty lime, or bag lime, an eggcup full of raw linseed oil may be beaten in at this stage.)

7.



Pour through sieve into second bucket, working through any lumps, but leaving any grit in the sieve. Wash out the first bucket and the sieve.

If pigment is not to be used then go on to stage 9.

8.



Stir in the pre-mixed pigment. The colour in the bucket should be considerably darker than the end result required: i.e. a rich yellow ochre will dry to cream. Too much pigment will reduce the binding power of the limewash. A test for colour can be made on paper and dried quickly in the sun or before a fire as a guide.

9.



Dilute the mixture until it is the consistency of milk and sieve again into the first bucket.

This limewash is now ready to use.

A bucket of limewash should cover the walls & ceiling of an average room with a fairly smooth surface.

USING THE LIMEWASH

Generally, limewash should be applied thinly and be allowed to dry out slowly. A very fine surface can be achieved using putty lime or quicklime provided sieving is careful & thorough and there are several thin applications. This good quality limewash will develop a strong finish and will not brush off on clothes etc.

1. **PREPARATION** : The surface to be limewashed should be brushed or washed free of any loose particles, dust, dirt, lichen etc. If there is much mould growth, the surface may be treated with a fungicide. Any deep holes should be pointed in advance with a lime mortar.
2. **DAMPING DOWN** : This is very important for a good finish. Taking an area of about 4 sq. yards at a time, spray the wall surface with water so that the water in the limewash will not be sucked out immediately it is applied. Old limewash, cob, lime plaster etc will need more damping down than hard stones.
3. **APPLYING THE LIMEWASH. FIRST COAT** : Brush the limewash onto the dampened area, working it well into any cracks & joints, but not allowing it to build up too thickly at any point or it will craze on drying out. The limewash will be transparent on application, so care is needed for even coverage. Move to the next area, damping as you go.
4. **SUBSEQUENT COATS** : Allow the previous coat to dry out completely, preferably overnight. Lightly damp down the previous coat before applying the next. Three coats at least should be applied in all; more on new external surfaces. After the initial drying out, limewash will continue to harden & strengthen for several weeks.

Sources of Materials

Quicklime and prepared putty lime

See SPAB Information Sheet 9: An Introduction to Building Limes.
Quicklime—ask for high calcium lime suitable for limewashing.
Prepared putty lime—ask for a high quality pure putty lime.

Bag lime

Hydrated lime. This is stocked at nearly all builders' merchants under trade names such as "Limbox" and "Hydralime".

Pigments

Brodie & Middleton, 68 Drury Lane, London WC2 (071-836 3289).
H. J. Chard & Sons, Feeder Road, Bristol BS2 0JT (0272 777681).
Cornelissen & Sons, 105 Russell St, London WC1 (071-636 1045).
Fiddes & Sons, Brindley Rd, Cardiff (0222 340323).
Foxell & Sons, 57 Farringdon Road, London EC1 (071-405 2487).
W. S. Jenkins & Co, Jeco Works, Tariff Rd, Tottenham, London N17 0EN (081-808 2336).
John T. Keep & Sons, Theobalds Rd, London WC1 (071-242 0313).
Kent Blaxhill, see tallow.
Liberon Waxes, 6 Park St, Lydd, Kent (0679 20107).
Nardoni, 46 Lambourne Close, London W3 (081-579 5654).
Nutsell Natural Paints, Newtake Cottage, Staverton, Devon TQ9 6PE (0804 26329).
E. Parsons & Son Ltd, Blackfriars Rd, Nailsea, Bristol BS119 2BU (0275 854911).
Paper & Paints, 4 Park Walk, London SW10 (071-352 8626).
Potmolen Paint, 27 Woodcock Industrial Estate, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 9DX (0985 213960).

Rose of Jericho, Jericho, Deene, Corby, Northants NN17 3EJ (0780 85456).

Pigments for colouring mortar are available from various builders' merchants.
Raddle is available from agricultural suppliers.

Raw Linseed Oil

Any builders' merchants or paint shop.

Tallow

Ask for good quality tallow. Available from some builders' or plumbers' merchants (it may have to be ordered). Animal by-products firms (found in Yellow Pages) usually sell large quantities but can sometimes be persuaded to sell it in small amounts (telephone).

Also from:

Kent Blaxhill, 129-139 Layer Road, Colchester, Essex (0206 575171).

M. W. Partridge & Co, 60 High St, Hadleigh, Suffolk (0473 822333).

Potmolen Paint, see pigments.

Severn Valley Stone, 63 Church St, Tewkesbury GL20 5RZ (0684 297060).

For suppliers in a particular area contact the UK Renderers Association (081-390 2022).
Also try local ironmongers and slaughterhouses.