

# **Beginners Guide to Spray Paint Vandalism**

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When I first got into using spray paint, I was frustrated at how little information there was online about what paint is good, what isn't, how spray paint tips work, what is the hardest to buff, and stuff like that. I did a bunch of digging on graffiti message boards and IRL experiments since I didn't have any graffiti friends to ask. The purpose of this guide is to help other radicals not waste time with bad paint and give some tips to maximize their output with minimum time and money. I have no experience with graffiti or street art, just scrawling my messages on walls.

## **Gear**

There's a lot of spray paint available on the market and if you're anything like me, you probably found yourself wondering "do I need the spray paint marketed towards graffiti artists? (Molotow, Montana, etc)"

The answer is no. Those brands make good paint, but they're expensive and usually locked up in cages where they're sold, whereas spray paint marketed for general use is available at Walmarts, Home Depots, and Lowe's across the country open on shelves. Since you're just trying to get our message seen, and most of you are broke as shit, you should go for hardware store paint.

### **Rusto 2x**

The best kind of spray paint available at the hardware store is Rustoleum 2X, the other kinds of Rustoleum (Rusto) are also good. 2X comes in many different colors and finishes and is widely used by graffiti writers in the US since it's pretty good and is easy to steal. Krylon isn't as good but is serviceable, but by all means, avoid the dollar cans. These will be on the bottom rack of the spray paint aisle of your local hardware store or Walmart. I think they cost over \$2 now because of the "inflation" crisis, but even when they were \$1, they weren't worth it because they're extremely watery. The only good use for them is scanning them at the self-checkout with a cart full of rusto (more on that below).

### **Rusto Turbo**

These big bois are designed to paint an entire garage door or coat a car. They have a much higher pressure than regular Rusto, and have a chisel tip that produces a really wide, dirty line. Don't let the size fool you though, the can runs out pretty quick because it puts out so much paint. These cost a good deal more than regular cans of Rusto (about \$16) and only come in a few colors. You can find these at Home Depot and Lowe's, but not Wal-Mart.

A word of caution with Turbo cans is that they clog really easily, so you should use the whole can in the same outing when you use it. If you test it, put it away, and use it again, you'll end up with three lines instead of one big fat line. The Patriot Front boys in Denver ran into this issue when trying to cover up a mural.

Fat caps won't work on Turbo cans, there are some ways to get different tips on these if you search around, but I don't really see the point unless you're doing graf.

## **Self-Etching Primer / Acid Etching Primer**

If you're wanting something to hurt your target's wallet, this is a good go-to. This stuff has an acid in it that damages paint, glass, and other surfaces it's applied to. It's usually used to coat raw metal, but graffiti writers in Denver have found it also works well against gentrifying businesses.



It costs around \$200 to try and buff out this type of paint, but often the process leaves the glass foggy or does not erase the work at all. Businesses are then left to decide whether they want to drop over \$500 on window replacements, or leave the damage as is.

You can get self-etching paint at in the auto section of Walmart and big hardware stores, but it only comes in a few drab colors. Self-etching paint is also available from auto shops as a liquid paint, which could be a good way to make a windshield get replaced silently.

## **1.2 Tips or Caps (Optional)**

People have been modifying their spray paint cans to get different outputs for decades, usually by changing the nozzle, or cap, the paint comes out of. You can get a wider line from you paint with a fat cap. I like these because they allow me to get more surface covered with paint in the same amount of time, allowing me to have a bolder, easier to read message. The trade off with the wider tip is the paint comes out at a lower pressure than the stock cap, so they don't work well if you're painting a sidewalk or anything else that requires the can to be pointed at the ground.

There are a bunch of different fat caps available for different kinds of paint. 10 years ago, Rustoleum changed their valve system so normal fat caps (and other caps) wouldn't work on their paint, presumably to make Rusto less popular with graffiti writers. Fortunately, it didn't really work, and low-cost fat caps for Rusto spray paint are easy to get. What you

need to get are **Rusto Female Fat Caps**. These will give you a line about twice as thick as a stock cap. You can buy these at a variety of graffiti shops and on eBay in bulk for cheap, just make sure you get the Female kind, not the male kind with the orange dot.

You can also get similar results with the cap from a can of Easy-Off Oven Cleaner. It doesn't produce as thick of a line, but they're also easy to grab off the cans wherever they're sold.

## **Gloves**

You should wear gloves when painting so you don't get paint on your hands because cops will look at that to see if you've been doing a heckin vandalism, also it's not great to get the paint on your skin. Nitrile gloves are good for this, as they are cheap, hypoallergenic, and also reduce finger prints. You can get super stealth black ones at automotive shops or online. Pharmacies and most general stores will have blue ones available, which are fine. Try to get medium thickness or higher as the thin ones will rip. Dump them as soon as you can somewhere that won't be found after you have done your painting. In the winter however, you'll probably want cold weather gloves as the cans get really cold as you use them.

## **Respirators**

Spray paint contains a lot of harmful vapors. If you're continuously painting for more than 10 minutes, or are painting inside, you should probably wear a proper respirator with P100 filters. Since you'll probably be in and out and not dumping cans on a single wall, an n95 is fine. Whatever you do, cover your face for opsec reasons. There are cameras everywhere.

## **Acquiring Paint**

Here's a list of how to get paint on a scale of least risky to most risky (also most expensive to least expensive).

### **Buying Paint**

Always pay with cash (make sure you go to a register that accepts cash), ideally wear a mask and clothes that you aren't going to wear when you're painting. Try to create a time buffer between acquiring the paint and when you use it. The length of this depends on how spicy your vandalism is and how dedicated the cops are to finding you, but you should never buy paint the same day you go painting.

Most stores require you to be 18 or older to buy spray paint, so be ready to show an ID. Some will even ask for a phone number, you can enter a fake one.

## Dollar Can Discount

Remember when I said there was one use for dollar cans? This is it. A good way to get paint on the cheap, short of just racking it, is to grab one or two dollar cans, as well as however many cans of whatever you actually want. Then go to the self-checkout and scan the dollar cans over and over until you cover how many cans are in your cart. You should try to dress like someone who doesn't do crimes. It's not free, but your cans of rusto are \$2 each now instead of \$6. If you want, you can even go back and return the dollar cans.

As with any self-checkout shenanigans, it is a good idea to have enough money to pay for the whole legitimate purchase if the self-checkout attended grills you. Just feign ignorance. You can always return the cans later and try again elsewhere or another time. I like this method because you can get a lot of paint for not much money, without as much risk as just boosting them.

## Concealment

This is just shoplifting. There are plenty of better resources online on how to do this. Just stick those shits in your JNCO jeans and walk out.

## Walkout

For the brave, you can load up your cart with paint and whatever else and just walk-out. Many stores have no-touch policies for shoplifters, so they won't stop you, but will call the cops if they notice. Bring an old receipt to have in your hand as you leave the store, park well away from the store so your car isn't on camera (if you have one), load up your cart, and GTFO. Don't go back to that store for a year.

## Pro Vandal Tips

### Leave your phone at home

Your phone collects a lot of data from you. Even if you disable the GPS, cops can subpoena your cell phone company to see where your phone pinged with a good degree of accuracy. Just leave it at home turned on as if you were at home taking a nap



## Plan out your piece

This isn't like planning a masterpiece, but just drawing out what you want to say on a piece of paper helps me a lot. If you don't suck at art you might not need to do this, but it helps get your spacing right and you don't want to have to be deciding whether the "FUCK" should go next to the "12" or on top of the "12" while you're on the side of a busy highway.

You can use Google Maps street view (in Tor or with a VPN in an incognito window) to check out the spot, as well as how to get there. How much planning you need will depend on how mad the cops will be that you did it.

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Rose City Counter-Info editor's note: a VPN is far less effective than Tor at protecting anonymity, but simple graffiti will rarely be investigated to the extent to which this might matter. However, there are exceptions to this, such as the FBI investigation into Janes Revenge graffiti in Florida.

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## Try Not To Rush

If you're like me, you get nervous criming and want to get it done quickly. You will make typos and spacing errors if you rush, all for what? Getting out of there 20 seconds faster? Be realistic with your threat modeling. If you're out at night, most people won't even see you. The subset that do probably won't call the cops, for the subset of that subset that might call the cops. it will take time for the call to finish, for the dispatch to contact the boys in blue, and for them to get to you (if they decide to move at all). By that time, you should be out of there.

I'm not saying spend all day there, but just take a couple extra moments to make sure your message looks ok and is legible.

## Stay Humble

Spray painting shit isn't as big of a nuisance as some anarchists think it is. There is a part in this Filler zine called "Why I Left DSA" that says "hostile graffiti culture kept the developers at bay."<sup>1</sup> The idea that graffiti is "keeping developers at bay" is... optimistic at best. It can be one part of slowing gentrification, but it's not a huge hurdle if we're being honest. It's fun, it's cool, it's annoying, it costs money to remove, and we love to see it. It doesn't have to be deeper than that.

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<sup>1</sup>"Why I Left the PSL... or the DSA or Socialist Alternative or whatever"  
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