

CONSUMER REPORTS



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Olympic Premium and Benjamin Moore Aura have lower VOC levels than other interior paints Consumer Reports tested and did a good job in tests.

Tests reveal surprises about paints

Green is hot for paint companies, according to the editors of Consumer Reports — and they're not talking about color.

"Good for your family, better for our world," proclaims the Freshaire Choice label. "0 percent Toxic. 100 percent Smart," Mythic Paint says. "An ideal choice for rooms such as nurseries," Sherwin-Williams suggests.

CR explains that allowable levels of VOCs, or volatile organic compounds, for paints and products such as aerosol air fresheners, carpets, and furniture have been toughened because VOCs contribute to ozone and smog formation and are linked to respiratory illnesses and memory impairment. And claims by many manufacturers have grown bolder as they market to an audience more familiar with and perhaps more receptive to buying green goods.

So CR shook things up in its report on water-based interior paints by measuring the VOC content of finishes that makers maintain have no VOCs and several high scorers that are marketed with no special claims. Their tests detected VOCs in every paint, though none exceeded any applicable government limits, and some paints had lower levels than others.

The top paints in CR's ratings had among the highest claimed VOC levels, including Behr Premium Plus Enamel (Home Depot) \$24 per gallon, low-luster, and \$22 flat; and Benjamin Moore Regal semigloss, \$45.

Lowering VOC levels can affect performance. Still, some no- and low-VOC paints did well in CR's tests. The top low-VOC finishes were Benjamin Moore Aura, \$57, and True Value Easy Care, \$25, both low-luster; flat-finish Olympic Premium (Lowe's), \$17, a CR Best Buy; and in the semigloss category, Sears Best Easy Living Ultra, \$25, another CR Best Buy.

Overall score primarily includes a paint's hiding performance, surface smoothness, and resistance to staining, scrubbing, gloss change, sticking, mildew, and fading. VOC level does not factor into CR's overall score.

Focus on VOCs

Federal VOC limits are now set at 250 grams per liter (g/l) for flat paints and 380 g/l for others. Some states and regions have lowered the VOC levels for paints that can be legally sold in their areas. California's standards are stringent: 150 g/l for nonflat finishes and 100 g/l for flat. Even tougher is the 50 g/l level for all finishes set by California's South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), around Los Angeles. The Environmental Protection Agency hopes to propose new federal VOC regulations in May, with a targeted effective date in 2011.

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Shoot yourself

To some, the Quik Pod is a nefarious device used for discouraging human interaction while traveling. To others, it's a stick to which you can attach your camera to take fairly steady and flattering self-portraits on the go.

The basic Quik Pod — essentially a monopod with a handle — costs \$34.95 and includes a clip, wrist strap, carrying bag and a bubble level to ensure your shots have a flat horizon. A new, heavier, 4-foot digital single-lens reflex model for larger cameras is also available for \$49.99. Both can be found at quikpod.com.

The standard model extends to 18 inches and closes to 7.5 inches. It weighs 3.5 ounces and attaches to any camera with a standard tripod adapter. The company's Web site suggests that the Quik Pod and its bigger cousin, the Quik Pod DSLR, are helpful for vacation photos and for taking snaps over crowds at a sporting event or concert.

While there's nothing quite like asking a stranger to take your photo in front of a bubbling fountain in a distant, sun-dappled piazza, sometimes it's easier just to whip out a big stick and snap away while letting the natives enjoy their own afternoon reveries.

— New York Times

ENTERTAINMENT & LIFESTYLE

Demystifying the monster

Lifelong battle with epilepsy spurs Westminster woman to write children's book

By Elaine Thompson
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WESTMINSTER — Danielle M. Rocheford vividly remembers her first epileptic seizure at age 4 while playing by herself on a swingset outside the family's home on Long Island.

The feeling was "weird," she said, one that she had never felt before.

"I remember telling my parents what it felt like," she said. "It was a very strong feeling of fear as if a monster was sneaking up behind me. It was a tingling, light feeling, but it went up and down my back, almost like when you get a chill." She was also rendered speechless.

During her early years when she felt this sensation, which she later learned was an aura, or a symptom that a more serious seizure could occur, she would tell her mother that she felt funny.

Mrs. Rocheford, now married and the mother of a 7-year-old son, recently wrote a children's book that explains her experiences with epilepsy. The book, "Mommy, I Feel Funny," hit the bookstores this month.

Mrs. Rocheford said she wrote the book because there were no books about epilepsy that were written at a child's level when she was growing up.

"Although I understood it, my classmates and their parents didn't. It wasn't really a topic spoken about because it was kind of unknown. Even today, this is something that so many people still don't understand," she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that about 2.5 million people in the U.S. have epilepsy. About 150,000 people, mostly children and older adults, develop the neurological

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Danielle M. Rocheford holds "Mommy, I Feel Funny," a children's book she wrote that explains her experiences with epilepsy.

TIG Staff/RICK CINCLAIR

RECIPE of the day

Roasted asparagus with spring onions and sun-dried tomatoes

- 1 1/2 pounds asparagus, bottoms trimmed
- 2 bunches scallions, ends trimmed
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, plus 1 tablespoon of oil from the jar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Start to finish: 25 minutes (10 minutes active); servings: 4.
Heat the oven to 450 degrees. In a large bowl, toss the asparagus and scallions with the oil from the sun-dried tomatoes. Transfer to a baking sheet and arrange in an even layer. Season with salt and pepper.

Roast for 7 minutes. Stir the vegetables and roast until tender and slightly browned, about another 5 minutes. Sprinkle with chopped sun-dried tomatoes and toss to combine. Serve immediately or at room temperature.

Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 94 calories; 36 calories from fat; 4 grams fat (1 gram saturated; 0 grams trans fats); 0 milligrams cholesterol; 11 grams carbohydrate; 5 grams protein; 5 grams fiber; 161 milligrams sodium.

— The Associated Press



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Asparagus not only is a pleasant and affordable harbinger of spring, it does great things for a healthy diet.