



Wood Floor

CARE

Caring For Your Wood Floor



If it's not NOFMA, it's not certified.

NOFMA is the foremost authority on wood floors. For more information about wood flooring manufacturing standards, wood floor care, or any other questions regarding wood flooring, visit www.NOFMA.org or call 901-526-5016.

Since the overwhelming majority of wood floors are composed of solid hardwood, this care guide applies specifically to this type of flooring.

Properly finished wood is the easiest of all floor surfaces to keep clean and looking like new, year after year, with only minimal care.

How minimal? Vacuum and/or dust mop weekly or more often if merited. Vacuuming is the best way to remove surface dust and dirt before it gets walked into the finish and dulls its luster. Vacuuming also pulls accumulated dust from the grooves of factory finished and plank floors.

Some wood floor care guidelines will depend on the type of floor finish. However, there are a number of preventive maintenance tips that are the first steps in caring for your wood floors, regardless of the finish type.

First and foremost, **wood and water don't mix**. No matter what finish your wood floor has, never pour water on your floor. While a slightly dampened mop may be used on polyurethane and other surface finishes in good condition, even small amounts of water can cause the deterioration of finishes and warp the underlying wood.

Also, when using any maintenance product, please read the label. Always follow label directions for maintenance products, except for directions which call for using water on wood. Always use only products specifically designed for wood floors. Contact your local wood flooring distributor for products and specific cleaning recommendations.



Preventive Maintenance

You can keep your car running better and longer when you regularly change your oil, check your tire pressure, and keep your radiator filled with antifreeze. Your wood floors benefit from preventive maintenance just as much as your car does. The following are some maintenance tips for keeping your floors looking great for years and years.

- Dirt and grit act just like sandpaper on any floor. To keep grit from entering in your home use dirt-trapping, walk-off mats at all exterior doors. NOFMA recommends placing throw-rugs or small sections of carpet just inside the entrances. Always remember to keep door mats clean.
- Vacuum regularly, as often as you vacuum carpets; a brush attachment works beautifully. Don't use the beater bar; it can damage the finish. Sweep or use an untreated dust mop daily or as needed, but do not use a household dust treatment as this may cause your floor to become slick, dull the finish, or interfere with re-coating. Please be aware that vacuum wheels may scratch the surface.
- Check with the flooring manufacturer before using a micro fiber pad to clean your floor. The micro fibers may catch wood fibers and lift a splinter or cause a tear, exposing unfinished wood.
- It is extremely important that the finish is fully cured (7 to 90 days depending on the type of finish) before placing any rugs, rug pads, etc. on the floor to keep from affecting the finish and leaving a prominent "rug print".
- Use a rug pad with any rug placed on your wood floor. (*NOTE: Kitchen mats are the exception to this rule.*) For rug pads choose 100% non-solvent based waffle type rubber, an untreated natural fiber such as wool or jute, or $\frac{1}{4}$ " chopped urethane. Do not use sticky or tacky backers. The plasticizers they use can attack and discolor finish. These same plasticizers may also be present in the backer of some rugs.
- In kitchens, use area rugs at high spill locations and at work stations— stove, sink, and refrigerator. Cotton is generally the best fabric since it is easily washed.
- Some finishes and certain chemicals in wood are affected by ultraviolet light and heat, causing the wood and some finishes to change color, develop a patina, or age. To avoid uneven appearance, move area rugs occasionally and drape or shade large windows.
- Wipe up spills promptly with a dry cloth or paper towel. Use a slightly moistened cloth for sticky spills if necessary, but be sure to wipe the floor dry with another cloth or paper towel.
- Keep heels on shoes in good repair, especially high heels. That also includes most boots with heels, such as cowboy boots. Heels worn away exposing steel support rods or nails will dent and scratch any floor surface, even concrete or steel.
- Pets need a rug for drool and wet coats. Be sure to keep all toys, bones, etc. that have hard corners away from the floor. Also, be sure to trim your pet's nails regularly to avoid deep scratches.
- Put felt fabric glides on the legs of your furniture; they allow furniture to be moved easily without scuffing the floor. Periodically clean glides since grit can become embedded in the fabric. Replace when the glides show wear (typically 6 to 12 months depending on use). Avoid casters made of hard materials like metals or hard plastics. If casters are necessary, use gray, non-marking rubber casters.
- Older furniture with wooden or metal wheels can severely damage wood floors when moved. To avoid damage, place a felt-bottomed coaster under each wheel, allowing the piece to slide, rather than roll, when moved.

Beyond these preventive maintenance tips, your floors will likely need additional care. Before determining what steps to take, you must first identify your floor's finish. The following section will take you through several steps to help identify your finish.

Two principal types of finishes are used on wood floors: **penetrating sealers** and **surface finishes**.

Your builder, realtor or flooring installer/finisher should be able to tell you what type of finish was used. In older homes, it might not be possible to contact the builder or flooring contractor to learn what finish was used. If you don't know the type of finish, try smudging the finish with a finger or scraping the finish with a fingernail or a putty knife in a hidden area or corner of the room.

- If no noticeable smudge is evident and/or clear finish was scraped up, follow the maintenance procedures for a surface finish.
- If the smudge is noticeable, the floors have likely been waxed and maintenance should follow the guidelines for floors with a penetrating sealer with wax.

Knowing the brand names of finishing products, particularly the final finish coat, is also helpful. If your floors are factory finished note the name of the manufacturer. Keep this information in your household data file to help you determine the proper floor care products.

As a general rule you can be sure your plank or strip floor was finished at the factory if it has V-shaped grooves or bevels along the edges where the boards join and sometimes where the ends butt. This may be only a slightly rolled edge.

If the floor has no bevels, it was probably custom finished on site after installation. To determine what kind of finish was used, call the builder or floor finisher, if possible. *(NOTE: Some site-finished plank flooring may also have beveled grooved edges.)*

Floors with surface finishes and floors with penetrating sealers will require similar care; but when it comes to removing stains or restoring the finish in heavy traffic areas, different methods are appropriate for these two types of finishes.

SURFACE FINISHES

Site-applied surface finishes include polyurethane, Swedish finish, moisture-cure urethane, and water-based urethanes. These are all blends of synthetic resins, plasticizers, and other film-forming ingredients which remain on and protect the surface of the wood. All are durable, moisture-resistant finishes. These finishes are generally available in high-gloss, semi-gloss, satin and matte. Any one of the above surface finishes is a good choice. They are recommended for kitchen floors or similar areas where there is exposure to water splashing or spills. *(NOTE: Even if your floor has a surface finish, penetrating sealers may have been used as an undercoat.)*

Most manufacturers of surface finishes do not recommend waxing because wax can make surface-finished floors too slippery. Once a surface-finished floor is waxed, it can be maintained by occasional waxing, but be advised that once waxed, a surface finished floor cannot be re-coated to rejuvenate it; it will need to be completely sanded down to the raw wood to restore the finish.

- **Polyurethane** (oil-modified polyurethane) is the most common surface finish. The finish tends to develop an amber tint as it ages.
- **Swedish Finish** (acid-curing urethane or conversion varnish) is another durable finish, generally harder than polyurethanes. This finish is clear, fast-drying and resists yellowing.
- **Moisture-Cure Urethanes** are the toughest finishes. Some are non-yellowing (check the can label). Gloss is the most common sheen.
- **Water-Based Finishes** are urethanes, acrylics and blends of acrylics and urethanes, and may be catalyzed. They are fast-drying, moisture-resistant, durable and resist yellowing. As the name implies, the vehicular component is water.

- **Varnish, Shellac and Lacquer Finishes** are rarely used today, and generally are not considered as durable as the more modern finishes. Shellacs are the softest and show water spots. Do not use a damp mop on shellacs. You can use a slightly damp mop on the others if not previously waxed. Varnishes are harder but not to the extent of modern finishes and will show more ambering over time. Lacquers are hard and brittle and scratch easily.
- **Polymer Finishes**, also known as acrylic impregnated or irradiated polymer finishes, are used primarily in commercial applications. Each brand of flooring using a polymer or acrylic impregnated finish has specific maintenance procedures which should be obtained from the manufacturer.

CARING FOR FLOORS WITH SURFACE FINISHES

IMPORTANT: DO NOT APPLY MOISTURE UNNECESSARILY, VACUUM INSTEAD. SPRAY/MIST/DAMP MOP ONLY AS NECESSARY. CONTACT THE FINISH MANUFACTURER TO DETERMINE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLEANING THE FINISH. GENERALLY SPEAKING, AMMONIA AND VINEGAR SOLUTION WILL DAMAGE OR DULL MANY SURFACE FINISHES AND SHOULD NOT BE USED TO CLEAN YOUR FLOOR. (SMALL AMOUNTS OF AMMONIA AND VINEGAR SOLUTION MAY BE NECESSARY TO REMOVE SOME STAINS).

With a surface finish, a *lightly* dampened mop can be used to clean up spills (if you can see even small beads of water on your floor, your mop is too wet).

For cleaning dirty areas, sweep, vacuum and follow with the manufacturer's recommended cleaner(s). To apply cleaner, dampen or spray a cloth until moistened, not wet. As you clean, dry up the residue with a dry sponge mop or terry pad mop. Newly finished floors should not be cleaned with water until the finish has completely cured, which may take 7 to 90 days.

When high-traffic areas of surface finished floors begin to show significant wear, abrading and re-coating an entire floor is the least involved choice for maintenance.

REPAIRING A SURFACE FINISH (SCRATCH OR GOUGE)

With special care and skill, you may be able to repair polyurethane finishes yourself. Such repair may be necessary after stain removal or water damage.

For a small, relatively inconspicuous area you might be able to repair by cleaning with steel wool followed by paste wax. You won't get an exact match but it could serve as a temporary repair. The alternative is sanding to expose bare wood over the entire room and applying new finish.

ADVANCED TECHNIQUE

CAUTION: ADVANCED TECHNIQUES REQUIRE ADVANCED SKILLS. ALSO, DON'T ATTEMPT THIS IF YOU HAVE AN OLDER VARNISH. THE OLDER FINISHES ARE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO REPAIR AND MATCH SUCCESSFULLY. LACQUER AND SHELLAC, HOWEVER, REPAIR MORE EASILY.

Use steel wool or fine sandpaper to remove layers of the finish from the entire length of affected boards. If necessary, stain and let dry completely. Apply the same type polyurethane as the original finish on surrounding strips. Read application direction. Taping the perimeter of the area with a quality release masking tape is helpful. Allow ample drying time. After the finish is dry, remove the tape.



PENETRATING SEALERS

As the name implies, a penetrating sealer soaks into the wood and hardens to seal the floor against dirt and stains. Penetrating sealers may also contain a stain to add color to the flooring. NOFMA strongly recommends these finishes not be used in kitchens and daily eating areas where spills are likely. This finish protects the surface from moisture but will stain, dull and/or whiten if the moisture remains on the finish for more than a short period.

The beauty and wear resistance of wood floors finished with a penetrating sealer may be further enhanced by wax. A wax coating forms a barrier against the most frequent kinds of abrasion, can be easily renewed, and imparts a soft shine to the floor.

Use wax with these two cautions:

- The wax (liquid buffing or paste) MUST be designed for use on hardwood floors.
- Do NOT use a product that has a water base. Some cleaning product manufacturers actually recommend water-based products for wood. NOFMA disagrees. NOFMA suggests *only* solvent-based products be used despite those recommendations.

Generally, solvent-based waxes will have the odor of mineral spirits. Check the label to be sure. Follow the manufacturer's directions for applying the wax, and buff it well. Buffing machines work well for buffing waxed floors. Commercial buffing machines, with buffer diameters of 15" to 17", are readily available from rental companies. You may also buff small areas with a household buffer or by hand with a cloth or pads.

CARING FOR FLOORS WITH PENETRATING SEALERS OR WAX FINISHES

With a penetrating sealer or wax coating, occasional buffing helps renew the shine and remove scuffs. With proper care, you may be able to go a year or more before having to re-wax your entire floor, though heavy traffic areas might require more frequent re-waxing. Wax-coated finishes should NEVER be cleaned or maintained with water— not even a damp mop.

After four to six months of wear, inspect your floors closely to see if there's been a dirt build-up or if the wax has discolored. If your floors were originally finished in a dark tone, you may see a lightening of the finish in traffic areas. After vacuuming, and before any other procedure, buff an area. If the shine is not restored, apply a new coat of wax and buff well.

For smaller areas with imbedded dirt, abused areas, and lightened areas in traffic lanes, use a solvent-based (not water-based) liquid cleaner or cleaner/wax combination.

Many solvent-based cleaners will be based on naphtha or petroleum distillate. Follow directions. For dark floors, choose a product in a compatible dark color. Spread it with steel wool. Rub to remove grime and the old wax, then wipe clean. Let floor dry. When using paste wax, wrap in a wad of cloth and apply a thin, even coat. The warmth of your hand and rubbing friction melts the wax. If dull spots remain after drying, apply a second coat to dull areas and repeat.

IMPORTANT: FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS FOR DISPOSAL OF THE STEEL WOOL OR CLOTH USED. WITH SOME PRODUCTS THERE IS A RISK OF SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION.

When deep cleaning excessively dirty floors, or when refurbishing an entire floor to restore to near original conditions, use liquid cleaners or restorers. Apply as directed with steel wool pads and then buff the floor with a commercial buffer. Follow by waxing with either a paste or liquid, using the same buffer for final polishing.

Follow manufacturer's directions for the cleaner. If your floors are stained (colored), it's a good idea to use a colored wax or cleaner to help maintain the original color. The best place for obtaining wood floor care products is a local dealer that carries floor finishing products.

CARING FOR SPECIAL SURFACES

White and Bleached Floors: Because of their light color, these floors need more attention than others. Like white carpet or vinyl, they show dirt more readily and they more quickly reveal damage from foot traffic than natural or darker stained finishes. Vacuum or sweep often. Wipe up liquid spills IMMEDIATELY. Follow the maintenance procedures recommended for the type of finish used. With factory or on-the-job finishes, light-tinted or white floors will likely change shade over time.

Handscraped/Distressed Wood: These are floors that have been beaten, scraped, or wire brushed to remove portions of the wood, giving it an antique, textured appearance. The resulting uneven surface tends to trap dirt, so we recommend vacuuming often. If soil remains, sweep with a stiff bristle broom and re-vacuum.

Such floors are usually stained a dark color with penetrating sealers and waxed to further convey the aged wood effect. What remains after the wire brush treatment, however, are only the toughest wood fibers, and these are somewhat resistant to penetration by the finish color. That means more frequent color renewal, which can be accomplished by the use of a wax or cleaner/wax combination of the proper color to maintain the original color tone.

REFINISHING

Wood floors that have become unsightly from years of wear or neglect can be restored to their original beauty. Machine sanding removes the old finish and exposes new wood. With the application of new finish material, floors are like new again. While the highly skilled home craftsman may want to undertake the task of refinishing, it is advisable to have a professional floor refinisher do the work.

Standard wood tones or other colors are readily available in penetrating stains. Coloring floors with pigmented penetrating stain will not obscure the grain markings.

GAPS AND SQUEAKS

All the wood in your home will contract or expand as the moisture in the air increases and decreases. Doors and windows may swell and stick during rainy seasons. In dry, cold weather, cracks and fine lines of separation may appear in wall cabinets and furniture. The same reaction to humidity, or the lack thereof, happens in your wood floors. This is a natural characteristic of wood.

Gaps: Tiny gaps between edges of boards may appear in dry conditions. This can usually be reduced by installing a humidifier. Balancing the moisture in your house creates a healthier environment for both your floors and your family.

Squeaks: First try lubrication. Apply a liberal amount of wax for waxed floors. For surface finishes, apply talcum powder or soap stone between adjacent boards where the noise occurs. Another method is to drive triangular glazier points between the strips using a putty knife to set them below the surface.



GAPS AND SQUEAKS (CONTINUED)

If these quick fixes don't work, drive 2" galvanized casing or finish nails through pilot holes drilled into the face of the flooring. Nails should be placed near edges of the boards. Set them with a nail set and hide with matching wood floor filler designed for finished floors.

The best solution for silencing squeaks requires more work and can be accomplished only where there is access beneath the floor (crawl space or basement). This involves placing wood screws from below. They are inserted through the subfloor and into the finish floor to pull the flooring strips tight to the subfloor. To avoid having screw tips break the floor surface, be sure not to use screws that are too long.

REMOVING STAINS

For floors with polyurethane or similar surface finishes, many stains can be prevented simply by immediately wiping up the spilled liquid.

For waxed floors, most stains can be prevented or minimized by keeping the floors waxed as previously suggested, and by wiping up any spilled liquid immediately.

The following stain removal guide offers some helpful suggestions for common accidents. Remember, when removing a stain, always begin at the outer edge and work toward the middle to prevent it from spreading.



Stain Removal Guide

SUBSTANCE	FOR WAX FINISH	FOR SURFACE FINISH
DRIED MILK OR FOOD	You may remove the superficial dried material with a sharpened blade or a putty knife. Be careful not to scratch the finish. Rub spot with damp cloth. Rub dry. Re-wax for waxed finish.	
STANDING WATER	Rub spot with No. 1 steel wool and re-wax. If this fails, sand lightly with fine (80 - 120 grit) sandpaper. Clean spot and surrounding area using No. 1 or 0 steel wool and mineral spirits or a wood floor cleaner. Let floor dry. Apply matching finish on floor, feathering out into surrounding area. Wax after finish is thoroughly dried.	Use recommended cleaner and buff vigorously with clean towel. Refinishing might be necessary.
DARK WATER SPOTS	Clean spot and surrounding area with No. 2 steel wool and a wood floor cleaner or mineral spirits. Thoroughly wash spotted area with household vinegar. Allow it to remain for three to four minutes. If spot remains, sand with fine sandpaper, follow the grain pattern of the wood, feathering out 3 to 4 inches into surrounding area, re-wax and polish. If two repeated applications of vinegar do not remove the spot, apply oxalic acid solution directly on the spot. Proportions are one ounce oxalic acid to one quart water or fraction thereof.**	Use recommended cleaner and buff vigorously with clean towel. Refinishing might be necessary.
HEEL MARKS/ CASTER MARKS	Rub vigorously with fine steel wool and wax floor cleaner. Wipe dry and polish.	Use cleaner to wipe off mark. Some marks may be carefully scraped up with a putty knife.
INK STAINS	Follow same procedure as for other dark spots.	
URINE STAINS	Spots that are not too old may sometimes be removed in the same manner as other dark spots. If spots resist cleaning efforts, replace affected strips, sand and finish.	
MOLD OR MILDEW	A surface condition caused by damp, stagnant air. In all cases, make sure the room is well-ventilated. Remove surface moisture. The mold can usually be removed with a wood floor cleaning liquid and No. 1 steel wool.	A surface condition caused by damp, stagnant air. In all cases, make sure the room is well-ventilated. Remove surface moisture. If mold is on the surface, wipe up with appropriate cleaner. If mold is under the finish, refinishing is necessary.
CHEWING GUM/ CRAYON/CANDLE WAX	Scrape the major residue with putty knife or razor blade. Apply ice until the deposit is brittle enough to crumble off. Cleaning fluid poured around the area (not on it) can seep under the deposit and loosen it. (Goof Off brand remover can dull the finish.)	
CIGARETTE BURNS	If not too deep, steel wool will often remove them. Lightly moisten steel wool with soap and water to increase effectiveness. Re-wax.	
ALCOHOL SPOT	Rub with liquid or paste wax, silver polish, boiled linseed oil or cloth barely dampened in ammonia. Re-wax.	Generally not affected.
OIL OR GREASE	Rub on a kitchen soap having a high lye content or TSP (trisodium phosphate), or saturate cotton with hydrogen peroxide and place over the stain; then saturate a second layer of cotton with ammonia and place over the first. Repeat until the stain is removed. NOTE: Ammonia may discolor the wood.	Wipe up using a recommended floor cleaner. Buff with clean pad or towel.
PAINT	Should not bond to the finish. Pop off with a putty knife and repair by rebuffering the wax.	First try popping off the dried material with a putty knife or sharp blade. If not easily removed, apply a rag soaked with rubbing alcohol and let it soften the latex for a few minutes then pop off with the putty knife.
FINGERNAIL POLISH	Should not bond to the finish. Pop off with a putty knife and repair by rebuffering the wax.	Fingernail polish is based on lacquer and can etch the surface finish and bond quite hard. Any solvent strong enough to remove the stain will attack the finish. The finish will likely will have to be spot sanded and touched up.

****CAUTION:** OXALIC ACID IS A POISON; USE RUBBER GLOVES. POUR A SMALL AMOUNT DIRECTLY ON THE SPOT AND LET SOLUTIONS STAND ONE HOUR. SPONGE SPOT WITH CLEAR WATER. A SECOND TREATMENT MAY BE HELPFUL IF SPOT REFUSES TO YIELD. IF SECOND APPLICATION OF OXALIC ACID FAILS, SAND AREA WITH NO.80-120 GRIT SANDPAPER, FOLLOW THE GRAIN, AND APPLY MATCHING FINISH, FEATHERING OUT INTO SURROUNDING FLOOR AREA. LET DRY. BUFF LIGHTLY WITH NO. 0 STEEL WOOL. APPLY SECOND COAT OF FINISH, LET DRY AND WAX. IF SPOT IS STILL VISIBLE, THE ONLY REMAINING REMEDY IS TO REPLACE THE AFFECTED FLOORING. (NOTE: OXALIC ACID IS A BLEACHING AGENT. WHENEVER USED, THE TREATED FLOOR AREA WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO BE STAINED AND REFINISHED TO MATCH THE ORIGINAL COLOR.) FOR SURFACE FINISHES: REMOVE FINISH AND TREAT AS ABOVE, BUT DO NOT WAX. AFTER AREA IS THOROUGHLY DRY, COAT WITH SURFACE FINISH.

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