



Hardwood Flooring Care Guide

The care and maintenance of your hardwood floor is important if it's to retain its beauty over the long haul. Hardwood flooring is meant to be a lifetime, as well as, a virtually maintenance-free floor so long as a few precautions are taken.

The two most important things to protect your floor from are:

- 1) **Moisture**, in any form, and...
- 2) **Scratches**

Moisture

We say moisture "in any form" because it is a typical phrase heard from manufacturers of care products whose labels state "our product will not harm your floors" or "specially formulated for finishes on hardwood floors". They are not misleading their customers in any way, however, they are also not cautioning consumers about the misuse of their product(s).

Moisture can enter your flooring, regardless of the kind and/or type of finish you have, in two separate forms: gaseous (humidity) and liquid forms. For the purpose regarding care and maintenance of hardwood floors, we are talking about surface finishes which include urethanes, varnishes, and/or hard oil waxes. Wood is a natural material which reacts to changes in moisture levels. Some moisture level variation is normal, as daily changes in humidity is to be expected, and will be less dramatic in drier climates than those with higher moisture contents. If high humidity is an intermittent problem, it may be beneficial to install a de-humidifier in your home to offset those periods when high enough moisture causes your floor to grow (expand or gain width). The most frequent complaints, however, are due to other causes.

Mopping or washing your floor is permissible but, caution is of utmost importance. Care should be taken not to allow and, more importantly, not to force moisture in between the cracks. Since your floor does move according to moisture present, you cannot expect your finish to bridge the cracks at all times. This leaves access to the edges of your floor below the finish. This is normal. When you mop, do so without pressure such that water or other cleaning products, which are mostly water, are not forced into the gaps. Many times the perception of applying more "elbow grease" for better results by the one doing the cleaning is mistaken for fact and/or good common sense.

In reality, better results are achieved by keeping their mop head or cleaning rag cleaner and by not spreading a dirt film around. When cleaning, the film left by your cleaning pass should already begin to dry before you start the next pass. This is a good indicator of a "slightly damp" application. This is what you want.



Another aspect of mopping hardwood floors is frequency. The frequency should be dictated by necessity and not by schedule. Adequate cleaning, for the most part, should be attainable by vacuum or dust mop. When cleaning with a vacuum, use only a vacuum wand with clean soft hair or bristle head. **NEVER** use a rotating or vibrating brush. This can cause splinters from cracks and can wear the finish when done over time. Dust mops are also great cleaning tools, but like mop heads, if you use a dirty dust head, you could just be moving dirt from place to place. For the most part, only use moist cloths to clean up spills and make sure to dry once it is clean.

Scratches

Scratches are the other maintenance issue that can be avoided with simple preventable steps. **NEVER** slide hard surfaces over your floors without placing protection between surfaces. All chairs and other furniture that are in direct contact with hardwood floors should have quality protective soft padding attached and these should be changed as they wear. Hard soul shoes (i.e. dress shoes and boots) and especially damaged souled shoes should be kept from the floor. This includes, most especially, defectives heels, stilettos, and sport-specific shoes containing cleats.

Other Notables

Some other cautions are necessary to mention. These include high-traffic areas, area rugs, non-skid padding and ammonia/chemical-based cleansers.

Surface finishes are meant to protect your floor for a life-time so long as they are kept in good repair. The key to never having to re-sand your floor is never allowing the top layer of finish to wear away. In other words, when you see a wear pattern starting to develop (dullness in high traffic areas), have a professional install a new coating of protection before it gets bad. **NEVER** oil or wax a surface finish as this can leave a residue which will keep a subsequent recoating from adhering fully. Once you see darkness in the grain of the wood or in the joints you have most likely let your finish go too far and/or have been mopping with either too much water and/or too much consistency.

Another malady sometimes occurs concerning area rugs. One that cannot usually be avoided, and is generally considered as normal, is the different color line(s) that are caused by UV rays hitting the exposed floor as opposed to that part covered by the rug. Some dark woods, by nature, will do this significantly with artificial light as well as sun light. One thing that is necessary to minimize this is to not place your rugs down until the finish has had adequate time to cure. (Check with your professional for this.)

Also, non-skid pads under your rugs can react with the finish and cause a “film” to develop which usually cannot be removed. It is a good idea to check with the supplier and see if they have had any experience with their product on hardwood flooring.

Lastly, be aware that chemicals can dull or damage your finish, especially ammonia and other harsh cleansers.