

Surface Finishes

Surface finishes are very popular because they are durable, water-resistant and require minimal maintenance. Surface finishes are blends of synthetic resins. These finishes most often are referred to as urethanes or polyurethanes, and remain on the surface of the wood to form a protective coating. They generally are available in gloss, satin, and matte finishes.

To determine if your floor has a surface finish, check the original installer or refinisher records. If those are not available, scratch the floor gently with a coin in an inconspicuous area behind a door or in a corner. If the finish flakes, it likely is a surface finish floor. Another test you can try is to apply two drops of water in an inconspicuous area. If white spots do not appear within 10 minutes, your floor likely has a surface finish and should be maintained accordingly.

CLEANING

For surface finishes, you should use the manufacturer's recommended cleaning products. If the manufacturer is not known, use a generic hardwood floor cleaner, which is available at your local retail flooring store. You should never use wax-based products on a surface finish floor, as it will damage the finish. Petroleum-based cleaners should be avoided on water-based finishes as well.

SPILLS

Wipe up spills immediately. Use a slightly dampened cloth and follow with the manufacturer's or a generic hardwood cleaning product.

STAINS

For stubborn stains, lightly dampen a cloth with the manufacturer's or a generic hardwood cleaning product, and gently rub the stain. Repeat as often as necessary until the stain is removed.

DAMAGED FINISHES

When the floor begins to lose its luster, you should contact a professional to refinish your floor and restore it to its original beauty.

Wax Finishes

Wax finishes soak into the pores of the wood and harden to form a protective penetrating seal. The wax gives a low-gloss satin sheen. It generally is maintained with additional thin applications of wax. Only solvent-based waxes, buffing pastes or cleaning liquids made specifically for wax-finished wood floors should be used.

To determine if your floor has a wax finish, check the original installer or refinisher records. If those are not available, use a small amount of mineral spirits on a clean, white rag in an area that has not been exposed to high traffic. If a slight yellow or brown color appears on the rag, you likely have a paste wax finish on your floor. To test for acrylic waxes, mix a small amount of dish soap, ammonia and water, and place a drop of this mixture on the floor in an area that has not been exposed to high traffic. If the spot turns white, you likely have an acrylic wax finish on your floor and it should be maintained accordingly.

CLEANING

There are products available at retail flooring stores that can be used to clean wax floors. You will need to follow the manufacturer's directions carefully to determine how long the cleaner should remain on the floor, and will need to apply a new coat of wax to the floor after it is cleaned.

SPILLS

Wipe up spills immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth. If necessary, clean the area with the manufacturer's recommended cleaning product, or odorless mineral spirits. If the area becomes dull, buffing may be necessary.

STAINS

To remove white spot stains caused by water, use #000 fine steel wool and a small amount of mineral spirits. Rub gently in a circular motion until the spot is gone, then wax and buff the area.

DAMAGED FINISHES

For floors that have lost their luster in heavy traffic areas, buff those areas with a polishing brush or pad. If this does not work, try waxing the areas and buffing again. To restore the finish on the entire floor, you will need to strip, sand and wax the entire area.

Acrylic Impregnated Finishes

Acrylic impregnated finishes are injected into the wood to create a super-hard, extremely durable floor. Acrylic impregnated finishes are rarely used in residential applications. They most often are used in very high traffic areas in commercial settings such as malls and restaurants.

To determine if your floor has an acrylic impregnated finish, pull up a floor vent and look at the side of the wood. If you can see consistent color throughout the board, you most likely have an acrylic impregnated floor. You should note, however, that some species of wood will have a consistent color throughout the board and are not impregnated floors, so if you are in doubt, you should contact a wood flooring professional.

CLEANING

How you clean an acrylic impregnated floor will depend on the finish. If you have a urethane-based finish, you should follow the same procedures for surface finished floors. If you have a nonurethane-based finish, you will need to use a spray and buff system, as recommended by the manufacturer.

SPILLS

Wipe up spills immediately and clean with the manufacturer's recommended cleaning product. When the spill is thoroughly removed, hand buff the area to return the floor to its original luster.

STAINS

For stains, follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Light sanding may be required, or, in the case of nonurethane-based finishes, you may be able to use mineral spirits or hydrogen peroxide to remove the stain.

DAMAGED FINISHES

Dull finishes on nonurethane-based finishes may require light screening, followed by a thorough cleaning and conditioning with the manufacturer's recommended products. For urethane-based finishes, sanding and refinishing the floors may be required.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Keeping your hardwood floors looking beautiful is easier than you think. Today's hardwood floors can be cared for with minimal effort, and in most cases, a little preventive maintenance will keep your floors looking beautiful for years to come.

No matter what kind of floor you have, or which type of finish is used, all hardwood floors should be cleaned regularly. Simply sweep, dust mop or vacuum the floor with the beater bar turned off to remove dirt and grit. Avoid using a wet mop on your hardwood floor as it can dull the finish, or even damage the wood.

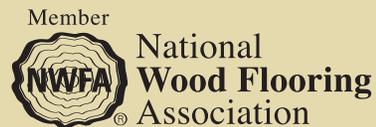
Place scatter rugs at all entrances, avoiding those with rubber backs, which can discolor your floor. Scatter rugs will help keep dirt and other debris from scratching your floors. You also can prevent scratching by placing floor protector pads on the bottoms of any furniture that comes into direct contact with your floor.

Be sure to clean spills immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth. Allowing spills to remain on your floor could damage the finish, as well as the wood.

You also should avoid walking on your floors with cleats or high heels in disrepair. These can scratch the finish, or even dent your floor.

Beyond these general guidelines, it is important to know which type of finish has been used on your floor for other maintenance concerns. Different wood flooring finishes require different care, and it is important to use the right product to protect your floors and prolong their life.

If in doubt about how to care for your hardwood floors, you should contact a wood flooring professional. The National Wood Flooring Association can help you find a qualified professional in your area. For more information, call the NWFA at 800-422-4556 (USA), 800-848-8824 (Canada), or 636-519-9663 (International). You also can get more information on-line at www.woodfloors.org.



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Real Wood Floors



Cleaning and Maintenance