

# Hardwood Floors: Preventive Maintenance



Cut hardwood-floor cleaning time with smart preventive maintenance. Position mats both outside and inside exterior doors to lessen tracked-in dirt. In snowy or rainy weather, include a boot removal area to avoid damage from water and de-icers.

Prevent marks by using floor protectors under furniture and by using rugs in play areas to ensure children's toys don't scratch the floor.

## Hardwood Floors: Basic Care

Speed up the cleaning process by first dusting the floor with a mop that has been treated with a dusting agent to pick up dust, dirt, and pet hair that might scratch the floor surface. For weekly or biweekly cleaning, vacuum with a floor-brush attachment on a vacuum cleaner or an electric broom. Do not use a vacuum with a beater bar attachment, which can scratch a wood floor's finish. For quick dusting, use disposable electrostatic cloths, available at grocery and discount stores. Save money by using both sides of the disposable cloths.

## Hardwood Floors: Deeper Cleaning

Dirt, oil, and grime build up over time and aren't completely removed by a weekly dust mopping. For occasional deep cleaning (consider doing the cleaning in the spring or just before the winter holidays), use a wood-cleaning product diluted according to the label instructions. Saturate a sponge or rag mop in the water, then wring it almost dry so it feels only slightly damp to the touch. Damp-mop the floor, being careful to prevent standing water on the floor. Rinse with a clean mop dampened in clear water, but only if the cleaning product requires it. Wipe up excess liquid because standing water can damage wood surfaces. If the weather is humid, operate a ceiling fan or the air-conditioner to speed up drying.

## Hardwood Floors: Removing Marks

Consider your floor's finish before trying to remove a mark. If the stain is on the surface, your floor probably has a hard finish, such as urethane. If the stain has penetrated through to the wood, the floor probably has a soft oiled finish -- common in older homes whose floors have not been refinished and resealed. Wipe surface stains from a hard finish with a soft, clean cloth. Never use sandpaper, steel wool, or harsh chemicals on such a surface because they can permanently damage the finish.

The following remedies are for hardwood floors with soft oiled finishes. If needed, end each treatment by staining the wood, then waxing and buffing the spot to match the rest of the floor.

- Dark spots and pet stains: Rub the spot with No. 000 steel wool and floor wax. If the area is still dark, apply bleach or vinegar and allow it to soak into the wood for about an hour. Rinse with a damp cloth.
- Heel marks: Use fine steel wool to rub in floor wax.
- Oil-base stains: Rub the area with a soft cloth and dishwashing detergent to break down the grease. Rinse with clear water. If one or more applications don't work, repeat the procedure. Keep children and pets out of the room until you're done. Let the spot dry, then smooth the raised grain with fine sandpaper.
- Water marks or white stains: Rub the spot with No. 000 steel wool and floor wax. If the stain goes deeper, lightly sand the floor and clean with fine steel wool and odorless mineral spirits.