

Hardwood floor repairs can be easy and economical for do-it-yourselfers

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY
The Associated Press

Replacing hardwood planks — especially sanding and finishing them to match what exists — is one of the tougher do-it-yourself tasks. On the bright side, there are many easy and simple hardwood floor repairs that can be made by most do-it-yourselfers; they can result in big savings and a better-looking floor.

Although there are several types of hardwood, the repairs discussed here work on most of them. Also, it doesn't make any difference whether the floor is a floating floor, glued in place or nailed — just as long as it is wood.

First, determine the finish — whether the floor is coated with wax or surface-finished with varnish or

polyurethane. Repairs for the two types of finishes are handled differently. If you don't know whether your floor is waxed or surface-finished, you can make that determination by rubbing it with mineral spirits or wax remover. If the surface dissolves, it's wax. If it does not, chances are good that it's polyurethane or varnish.

Waxed hardwood:

■ Scratches:

Scratches in a waxed floor usually are removed by buffing or waxing and buffing. If the scratches are in the wood, rub the area with 00 steel wool and wax.

■ Water stains:

If water stains or white spots exist, rub the area with 000 steel wool and wax. For problem areas (where the wood is scratched), lightly sand the area with fine sand-

paper and then clean the spot using 00 steel wool and mineral spirits or a wood floor cleaner. Finally, and after the floor has dried thoroughly, stain, wax and buff.

■ Dried milk and food stains:

Got kids? If you do, you might well experience dried milk or food stains on your hardwood floor. Gently clean the area with a damp cloth. Wipe it dry and apply a thin coat of wax.

■ Heel and scuff marks:

To eradicate heel marks, rub in a small amount of wax with 000 or 0000 steel wool, and hand-buff to a shine.

■ Mold and mildew:

For mold, rub with wood cleaner. The waxed surface will need a light coat of wax and a gentle buffing once the cleaner has done its job.

■ Chewing gum and crayons:

Sticky things like chewing gum, candle wax and crayons require a different touch. A plastic bag filled with ice or dry ice can be applied to the problem area and will cause the deposit to become brittle and, thus, easy to scrape away. Waxy substances can also be removed with a blot-

ter and an iron. Lay the blotter on the wax spot and heat the blotter with a clothes iron. The blotter will absorb the wax. Solvent-based wax also can be used. In every case, a coat of wax and a little buffing is a finishing touch that will make the difference.

■ Oil and grease:

Oil and grease stains are a little tougher — but not impossible — to remove. With any kind of grease, lye works best. Laundry detergent is good, but the more lye, the better. Or, saturate a pile of cotton with hydrogen peroxide and lay it over the stain. Then, saturate a second layer of cotton with ammonia and lay it over the first. Repeat until the stain disappears.

Surface-finished hardwood:

■ Minor scratches:

Lightly sand with 400- to 600-grit wet and dry sandpaper and apply a light coat of polyurethane. Touchup kits are available at your hardwood flooring store.

■ Grease spots:

A mild (5 percent) solution of vinegar and water works for most grease and oil

stains. However, there are special cleaners made specifically for use with polyurethane that work equally well.

If you have a pre-finished hardwood floor, it would be wise to use the cleaning and repair products offered by the manufacturer.

First aid for wood floors

When you have a wood floor, you know it's one of the most valuable assets in your home. But when it gets damaged, it can be a real headache. That's why we've developed this "First Aid for Wood Floors" guide to help you take care of the most common problems quickly and easily.

Water Stains: Blot up the liquid immediately. Then, mix a solution of one part white vinegar to two parts water. Dab the solution onto the stain with a clean cloth. Repeat until the stain is gone. Then, dry the area with a clean towel.

Oil Stains: Sprinkle the area with baking soda. Rub it in with your fingers. Then, vacuum up the soda. Repeat until the stain is gone.

Scratches: For light scratches, use a wood filler. For deeper scratches, use a wood putty. Sand the area smooth. Then, finish with a matching wood stain and a clear coat of polyurethane.

Discoloration: Mix a solution of one part white vinegar to two parts water. Dab the solution onto the discolored area. Then, dry the area with a clean towel.

General Maintenance: Sweep or vacuum the floor regularly. Use a damp mop to clean the floor. Avoid using harsh chemicals or abrasive cleaners.

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