

Smart Shopping for Home Furnishings



Selecting Wood Flooring

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Shopping for wood flooring? Wood flooring is very popular today. The reason is that consumers like the wood look, and wood floors can be easy to take care of, if you purchase one of the new hard finishes. Before deciding which type of wood flooring to buy, you should be able to answer these questions.

- WHAT'S ON THE MARKET?
- HOW MUCH DO I NEED?
- WHAT'S THE CONDITION OF THE UNDERSURFACE?
- WHAT'S ON THE LABEL?
- WHAT'S ON THE WARRANTY?

WHAT'S ON THE MARKET?

There are several different types of hardwood flooring from which to select. Wood flooring comes in different types of wood, stains and finishes, and ways of attaching it to the floor.

Types of Wood. The most common type of wood used for wood flooring is oak. Oak is a hardwood, which means it provides a surface that is not easily dented or scratched. Oak wears quite well as a hardwood floor. Other woods used less often are maple and teak.

Stains and Finishes. Wood flooring comes in different colors and types of finishes. The stain color may vary from light to dark and the finish may vary from unfinished to a wire brush finish. Unfinished wood flooring shows wear faster than finished wood floors and if you decide to finish your unfinished floor, it does take considerable effort. The lower grades of unfinished wood flooring may need additional sanding and have more irregularities than the higher grades of unfinished wood floors. On the positive side, if you decide to finish your wood flooring, the color and type of finish are controlled by you.

There are also the natural floor finishes, which are baked on at the factory. These finishes are moisture resistant and look like natural wood without a finish.

Plastic finishes such as urethane and acrylic are applied to the wood fibers to make them hard and durable. These plastic finishes are the hardest finishes you can buy.

The wire brush finish consists of a wire brush run over wood flooring, creating a rough, hard surface. The wire brush gets rid of the soft wood on the surface, making the floor more durable, less slippery, and easier to maintain. This surface also hides scratches and makes the wood surface look old, which some people like.

Patterns. Wood flooring is available in different patterns. The most popular are planks and parquet (see Figure 15.1, Wood Flooring Types). Planks can be purchased in uniform or random lengths, in a variety of widths, and with pegs or butterfly keys. For decoration, wood plugs of a different color are added to the planks. Parquet, made into units, is available in about 20 different patterns. The parquet pieces are put together into squares and cut into a geometric design, making the parquet effect. These wood pieces are fastened together with metal, paper, or webbing on the back for easy installation. The adhesive penetrates the paper on the back to provide a bond between the wood and the subfloor.

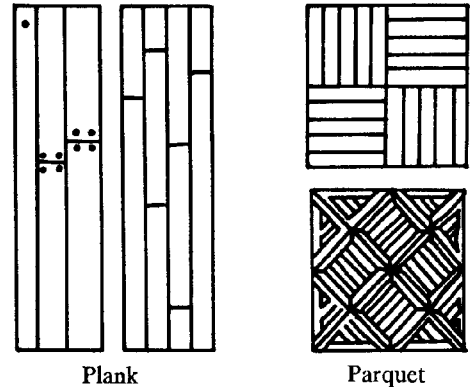


Figure 15.1. Wood Flooring Types

The webbing has spaces where the adhesive bonds the wood to the subfloor.

Layers and Thicknesses. Wood flooring comes in either laminated or solid (see Figure 15.2, Wood Flooring). The laminated wood flooring consists of several layers of hardwood glued together, with each layer laid in a different direction. All laminated wood flooring is glued, not nailed, to the floor and used in above- or below grade installation. The laminated flooring does not warp when laid on concrete. It will, however, warp when exposed to excessive moisture such as flooding. The solid wood flooring is the same wood throughout and is used in only above-grade application. If solid wood flooring is used below-grade, the boards swell and warp.

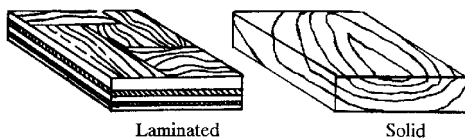


Figure 15.2. Wood Flooring

Ways of Attaching It to the Floor. If the wood flooring is to be nailed down, it has tongue and groove edges for nailing so the nails don't show. If the wood flooring is to be glued down, there are no tongue and groove edges.

The proper sized trowel and the appropriate adhesive are important when gluing down wood flooring. Follow manufacturer's instructions precisely.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED?

To figure how much wood flooring you need to purchase, multiply the length by the width of the room in feet, which gives you the square feet needed to cover the floor. Next, check the carton label to determine how many square feet are contained in each carton. Approximately 25 square feet of wood flooring are found in each carton. It is better to purchase a little more flooring rather than less. About 10% extra is recommended. Then you have some extra pieces in case of damage or defects.

WHAT'S THE CONDITION OF THE UNDERSURFACE?

You can put wood flooring over concrete or wood subfloor. There are special adhesives for the different types of wood flooring and the type of subfloor.

When putting wood flooring over concrete, you should use a laminated wood flooring, which will not warp or swell. All laminated wood floorings are made so that they glue down onto the concrete or wood subfloor. You can, however, install solid wood flooring on concrete, if you lay visqueen over the concrete, make a bridge of 2 x 4's, and nail the solid wood flooring to the 2 x 4's.

When putting wood flooring over a wood subfloor, be sure the subfloor is smooth. You may need to sand the seams of the subfloor to remove high spots. Usually the subfloor consists of plywood or particle board.

WHAT'S ON THE LABEL?

Inside each carton of wood flooring, you will find an information sheet providing installation information, the manufacturer's name, and the style number. Installation instructions include additional specific information concerning the proper trowel and adhesive to use. Most consumer complaints are a result of the do-it-yourselfer not using the right materials and not following instructions.

Wood flooring with few defects is called "#1 grade." If you purchase "#2 grade" flooring or seconds, you will find wood pieces missing and wood pieces with nicks. You can tell if you are buying seconds by looking on the carton. On the outside of the carton, you will see the number "2" or the words "second quality." The sales clerk should tell you that you are purchasing "second quality" so you will not expect replacement of defective pieces.

WHAT'S ON THE WARRANTY?

If there is a warranty on wood flooring, it should be given to you upon purchase. The warranty should be dated and signed by the retailer. You may need to ask for the warranty, if the retailer forgets to give it to you.

Generally the warranty indicates that if some of the wood flooring pieces are defective, the manufacturer will replace those pieces with good quality pieces. The most common defects are gouges or pieces of wood missing. Replacing defective pieces is not a big job. Since most defects occur on one piece of the wood flooring, which is easy to replace. The whole floor does not have to be torn up, unless the whole floor is defective.

There are some defects that show up some time after installation. One such defect is when the wood flooring layers delaminate. If this happens, the manufacturer will replace the damaged area.

✓ QUALITY CHECKLIST

After each question, answer with a yes* or no.

1. Is the wood flooring made from hardwood?
2. Is the finish on the flooring durable and easy to maintain?
3. If installed below grade, is the wood flooring laminated?
4. Did you figure out how many square feet of flooring you will need?
5. Did you check the carton to see if you are buying seconds?

6. Did you find out which type of trowel and adhesive you should purchase?
7. Did you obtain a copy of the warranty?
8. Did you read the warranty?

* If you answered all these questions with a yes, you can be assured of getting high-quality wood flooring.

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