

Moisture Management



Wood is an organic material that reacts to its environment. It is hygroscopic, which means that it absorbs and loses moisture in reaction to its surrounding environment. In humid environments, wood gains moisture and swells. In dry environments, wood loses moisture and shrinks. This is completely normal and happens at all stages of the wood life cycle, even as the tree is growing in the forest.

Why is it so important to manage the moisture in my environment?

If wood gains or loses too much moisture, problems can occur.

Wood that gains too much moisture can cup. Cupping occurs across the width of a floor board, with edges that are raised on each board and centers that are lower than the edges. Cupping always happens due to a moisture imbalance through the thickness of the board.



Wood that loses too much moisture can gap. Gapping occurs between floor boards. Gaps can vary in size and are considered normal if they appear and disappear during seasonal changes in humidity. Both of these issues can be minimized by maintaining an environment that is consistently between 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit, and 30-50% humidity. Significant fluctuations outside these ranges can result in cupping or gaps.

To keep wood floors looking and performing well for generations, follow these guidelines. Individual maintenance schedules will vary depending on use, wear and tear, and lifestyle.

There are other steps that can help maintain the beauty of wood floors.

- Do not use vinyl or tile cleaning products on wood floors. Self-polishing acrylic waxes cause wood to become slippery and appear dull quickly.
- Use throw rugs at doorways to help prevent debris from being tracked in and scratching the floor.
- Do not wet-mop or steam mop a wood floor. Water and steam can dull the finish and even damage the wood.
- Wipe up spills immediately with a slightly dampened cloth.
- Do not over-wax a wood floor. If a wax floor dulls, try buffing instead. Avoid wax buildup under furniture and other light traffic areas by applying wax in these spots every other waxing session.
- Put stick-on felt protectors under the legs of furniture to prevent scuffing and scratching. Replace these often as dirt and debris can become imbedded on the pad and act like sand paper on the flooring surface.
- Avoid walking on your wood floors with sports cleats and high heels in disrepair. A 125-pound woman walking in high heels with an exposed heel nail can exert up to 8,000 pounds per square inch. This kind of impact can dent any floor surface.
- When moving heavy furniture, do not slide it on wood flooring. It is best to pick up the furniture to move it and to prevent scratches.
- For wood flooring in the kitchen, place an area rug at the kitchen sink.
- Use a humidifier throughout the winter months to minimize gaps.

