



CARE OF FURNITURE SURFACES

Furniture, especially new, quality pieces, can be a major investment, a fantastic find at a flea market or a wonderful discovery in a relative's attic. Any of these pieces of furniture will provide a lifetime investment for beauty and enjoyment as well as function.

Furniture finishes vary from soft oil finishes to hard finishes including opaque painted finishes, clear finishes, lacquer, shellac, varnish and those containing polyurethane.

It's important for you to know the type of finish in your wood furniture in order to properly care for it. Remember that it's the finish you are cleaning, not the wood itself. If you are in doubt about the type of finish, try the following tests in an inconspicuous part of the piece.

Test for an oil finish by rubbing a few drops of boiled linseed oil into the wood. If it absorbs, the wood has an oil finish. If it beads up, the wood has a hard finish. To identify which hard finish, rub acetone over a spot in a gentle, circular motion. Lacquer will dissolve in 30 seconds under gentle, circular rubbing. Varnishes and shellacs will turn to a sticky, gel-like substance after a minute or two. Polyurethane/polyester finishes will shed acetone like water. (A shellac can be distinguished from a varnish because shellacs will dissolve quickly in denatured alcohol while varnish will react more slowly.

After you have decided which finish is on your wood furniture, then you're ready to use the appropriate procedures for routine and special maintenance.

For All Finishes...

Dust several times a week in order to maintain a clean surface and protect the finish from soil build up. Use a clean, lint-free, absorbent cloth for general dusting.

Protect all wooden furniture from direct sunlight. Exposure to the sun's rays can dry out the wood and actually bleach out the color.

Avoid both extremely moist or dry air. Use a humidifier or dehumidifier when needed to help keep wood from drying out or warping. Also, don't place your wood furniture near air vents; the forced air will adversely affect the wood.

Cover the bottoms of accessories and other tabletop items with felt to prevent scratching. Use coasters under glasses to prevent water marks. Never let water stand on a wood surface, and always use a protective plate under flower vases filled with water to keep moisture from drawing into the wood.

Wash your wood furniture surfaces once a year with a sudsy solution of mild soap and water. Using a clean, soft cloth from which most of the water has been wrung, work on a small area at a time. Overlap areas as you work. Clean with the sudsy solution, then rinse with a soap-free dampened cloth. Dry immediately with a soft, lint-free cloth. If the wood is extremely dry, grimy

or if there is a wax build-up, clean the wood with a clean, soft, lint-free cloth dampened with a cleanser-conditioner. (Use sparingly on shellac.)

Lacquers, varnishes, shellacs, polyurethane/polyester finishes, as well as painted surfaces can all be protected with waxes or polishes. Select the wax or polish according to the level of gloss or sheen you desire. Do not mix products as a dull film may result. To remove an inappropriate wax or finish, clean the piece with cleaner-conditioner, then apply the appropriate finish protection.

Paste waxes offer the best protection and with consecutive applications and a lot of buffing, provide a beautiful high gloss. Paste wax is recommended for fine antiques with a hard finish. It is available made from beeswax, a softer, more nourishing wax, and carnauba, a tougher, harder wax. Paste wax comes in various shades, from dark to light, to blend in with the tone of the wood. Clear waxes are also available for painted surfaces.

Aerosol or liquid polishes which contain silicones offer high gloss with very little buffing, clean as well as shine and give the wood a durable protective finish. However, silicones are rather difficult to remove and there can complicate the process of refinishing in the future. They also tend to show finger smudges more readily and need more frequent applications to maintain the gloss, causing a heavier silicone buildup.

Satin-gloss and low-gloss finishes are best achieved and maintained by the use of cream waxes or liquid cleaning polishes which do not contain silicones. Oil polishes can be used as well, but require more rubbing and attract dust quickly.

Even with the best of care, almost all pieces of furniture are subjected to accidents at some time. Many of the blemishes that occur in the home can be repaired without great expense. Only minor repairs should be attempted. Deep or severe blemishes should be left to the professional refinishers.

Repairing Minor Surface Damage...

Listed below are common blemishes that occur in the normal use of furniture. Treatments are listed starting with the easiest method first. No one treatment will work on every finish. Often, several treatments must be tried before one is successful.

- **Dents** -- Apply warm water to the depression. Fold a piece of brown paper five or six times and soak in warm water. Lay the paper over the dent and apply a **warm, not hot**, iron over the paper until dry. Repeat if needed. The dent should disappear if the surface is unbroken. Repolish the area when finished.
- **Candle Wax** -- Place an ice cube over the wax for a few seconds to harden the wax. Be sure to wipe up the water as the ice melts (to prevent water spots). Remove as much of the wax as possible with your fingers. Then scrape gently, using a plastic scrapper or the dull edge of a table knife. Wipe with cloth dampened with mineral spirits to remove remaining wax. Or rub spot briskly with a cloth saturated with cream wax
- **Alcohol** -- Alcohol is used in many common products, such as perfumes, medicines and beverages. When spilled, such a product can cause damage to furniture surfaces because alcohol has a tendency to dissolve varnish. Any spills should be wiped up immediately. If spotting should occur, try one of the following treatments:
 1. When damage to surface isn't too severe, try rubbing the spot with wax, silver polish, linseed oil or moistened cigar ash. Wipe with clean cloth and polish surface.

2. An application of ammonia will work on some finishes. Rub the spot with a damp cloth on which a few drops of ammonia have been applied. Follow immediately with an application of wax.
3. For spots not treated immediately, a more complicated process is needed. Make a creamy paste with rottenstone and a few drops of boiled linseed oil, sewing machine oil, or lemon oil. Apply the paste using a soft cloth and rubbing with the grain of the wood. Wipe dry with a clean cloth and polish surface.

NOTE: Rottenstone is a mild abrasive that is available at hardware or paint stores. Oil is used for lubrication. If a harsher abrasive is needed, powdered pumice may be substituted for rottenstone. Then finish with the rottenstone treatment.

- **Nail Polish** -- If it has not penetrated the finish, dip fine (3/0) steel wool in liquid wax and rub spot. Rewax. Never use nail polish remover, it softens finishes.
- **Burns** -- Burns are one of the most difficult blemishes to repair. The deeper the burn, the more damage there is to correct. When very deep or severe, refinishing by a professional may be the only way to repair the blemish.
 1. Minor Burns -- Scratch-concealing polish will sometimes hide the burn. The treatment used for old alcohol stains can also be used. Or dip a cotton swab in paint remover and rub the damaged area gently to remove charred material. Scrape the area if needed. Use one or two drops of clear fingernail polish to fill the depressed area. Let set and repeat until a build-up is attained.
 2. Severe Surface Burns -- Scrape the burned area with a sharp knife or single edged razor blade. To remove loose dirt or charred wood, clean the area with a cotton-tipped toothpick dipped in naphtha. Wrap 4/0 steel wool around the point of a wooden skewer or orange stick and smooth the damaged area. Clean area again with naphtha. Complete the process by rubbing the area in the direction of the grain with very fine sandpaper or an emery board.

Select an oil stain in a matching color and apply with a small brush or cotton-tipped toothpick. Be careful to stay in the damaged area. Reapply until the stain matches the original finish. Let dry at least twelve (12) hours.

Fill in the damaged area with a stick shellac in a color that matches the wood.

To apply the shellac, heat a spatula over an electric range until the blade is just hot enough to melt the shellac. Scrape off a small piece and press into the blemish using the edge of the blade. Repeat the process until the area is filled.

To level off the area, once again heat the blade, wipe it clean, and scrape it across the surface. Any excess shellacs still remaining may be shaved off with a razor blade.

To complete the treatment, sand off the surface using very fine sandpaper (8/0) or the fine side of an emery board. Rub lightly until the scratch is even with the finish. Finish by rubbing the area briskly with a mixture of rottenstone and a few drops of oil.

- **Grease Stains** -- Removing grease stains off furniture is a difficult task. If the stain is very deep or old, it may be impossible to remove. Try these methods on less severe stains:

1. Place a blotter over the grease spot. Press with a warm iron, repeating until the spot is removed.
2. Make a thick paste of Fuller's Earth and dry cleaning solvent. Apply to the greasy area. Allow the paste to dry and brush away. Repeat several times as necessary.
3. Saturate the area with naphtha (best), mineral spirits, or gasoline. Place Fuller's Earth, Talc powder, sawdust, or old cloths over the spot to absorb the grease as the first application draws it out. Continue until the spot is removed.

CAUTION: No cleaning solvents are available that effectively remove grease spots without some hazard to the user. Some solvents are flammable; some are toxic. Read all precautions and follow all directions carefully.

- **Ink Stains** -- If the finish is worn or damaged (such as unsealed wood), the ink will penetrate deep into the pores of the wood and will be almost impossible to remove. If, however, the finish has been protected with a layer of wax, ink can often be blotted up immediately without staining. Suggested treatments:

1. Blot up the ink immediately before it has a chance to penetrate the wood. Clean the surface using a cream wax or a damp cloth. **Do not rub.** Keep turning the cloth to prevent smearing. If stain is difficult to remove, use the rottenstone and oil treatment (number 3 under alcohol stains).
2. Apply an oxalic acid solution to the stain with a medicine dropper or glass rod. (Use two tablespoons oxalic acid to one pint lukewarm water.) Allow the solution to stand a few minutes and rinse. This is a bleach and it works slowly. Time must be allowed in order for it to act on the stain. It may also bleach out part of the natural color so apply only to the stained area. The bleach will work better if the spot is lightly sanded before applying.

- **Blisters, Loose Veneer** -- Slit the blister with the grain of the wood by using a brand-new single-edged razor. Apply glue sparingly, working it underneath carefully (a toothpick works well). Press blister down. Cover area with waxed paper and weight down with heavy books or clamps. Let dry while weighted down.

- **Paint Stains** -- Fresh paint may be removed by rubbing the spot with a cloth saturated in liquid wax.

For paint stains that have dried, cover the spot with linseed oil. Let stand until softened, then remove with a cloth wet with linseed oil. If any paint remains, remove with paste of rottenstone and oil.

- **Scratches** -- Minor scratches that have not penetrated the finish may be hidden by wax alone. Try one of the following ways to stain the scratch so that it becomes less noticeable.

1. Break a Brazil nut, black walnut, or butternut in half and rub into the scratch.
2. Color the scratch with brown coloring crayon or liquid shoe dye. This is an especially good treatment on walnut.
3. Stain the scratch with iodine. For mahogany use new iodine. For brown or cherry mahogany, use iodine that has turned dark brown. For maple wood use denatured alcohol to dilute iodine about 50%.

4. Place a few drops of sewing machine or lemon oil on the blemish and shake on enough rottenstone to form a paste. Rub the area briskly using a clean, soft cloth. Wipe the area frequently.

To repair deep scratches, remove all splinters and brush on an oil stain that is slightly lighter in color than the furniture. Fill the scratch with white shellac, being careful that the shell doesn't overlap the edges of the scratch.

- **Yellow Spots on Light Wood** -- As the aging process occurs in bleached or blond furniture, the chemical used to bleach out the natural wood color begins to lose their effect thus causing a change in color. Often this change is so gradual that it is not detected until a new piece is purchased in the same shade. Exposing light furniture to direct sunlight can cause a change to occur in only a few days, resulting in unattractive yellow spots. Since nothing can be done to remove these spots, it is necessary to keep furniture of this nature out of the sunlight.
- **Water Rings** -- Water rings that appear as a filmy gray spot are especially common on furniture. To remove, use one of the following treatments:
 1. Rub with wax and 4/0 (very fine) steel wool.
 2. Rub spot lightly with a soft, lintless cloth moistened with camphorated oil. Wipe immediately using a clean cloth.
 3. Dip a small piece of cheesecloth in hot water to which has been added two or three drops of household ammonia. Wring cloth out tightly and rub spot lightly.
 4. Place a clean, thick blotter over the spot and press with **warm, not hot**, iron. If this does not work, rub with a cleaning polish or wax.
- **White Marks, Spots, and/or Rings** -- White marks, spots, or rings on furniture are generally caused by some change in the finish due to heat, alcohol or moisture. Successful removal will depend on sufficiently warming and blending the surface without making it rough. Remember that not all substances will work on all finishes. Begin with the mildest and continue to try stronger ones until the spot has been removed.

Blemishes of this nature are similar to others listed. Usually the direct cause of the blemish is not known so that they are treated as one group.

1. Mix equal parts of boiled or raw linseed oil, turpentine, vinegar and rub the surface gently.
2. Rub lightly over the spot with a cloth dampened in a mixture of water and household ammonia (one part water to two parts ammonia).
3. Place a piece of blotting paper over the spot and press over it with a warm iron.
4. For varnished or shellacked surfaces (not lacquered) rub the spot with a cloth dampened in essence of peppermint, spirits of camphor, or turpentine and water. Watch carefully to see that the surface does not become tacky or sticky. When dry, apply a good wax furniture polish or polish with the oil and turpentine mixture.
5. Moisten a small cotton pad with alcohol or dilute shellac in addition to a few drops of raw linseed oil. Rub over the spot in the directions of the grain.

CAUTION: Use care in working with any treatment that requires a cleaning compound. Some products are highly volatile and inflammable. Provide some means of fresh air in the meeting room if possible. Caution the group about smoking while treatment is in process.

Read manufacturers labels and heed their warnings. Replace caps immediately after pouring liquids. Do not let containers of flammable liquids stand uncovered. Place cover on container while you work. Place rags or papers used in metal covered cans after use. Or destroy them at once.

SUMMARY OF PREVENTIVE CARE OF FURNITURE

To keep your furniture in good condition, follow these precautions in the daily care of any wood piece of furniture.

1. Avoid placing wood furniture near direct sources of heat. The added heat and dryness, particularly in the fall and winter, will cause the wood to dry out and lead to warping and cracking of the finish.
2. Avoid exposing indoor furniture to strong sunlight. Even though the finishing materials are made as fade-proof as possible, the wood may change color to give a bleached or faded appearance.
3. Wipe up liquids spilled as soon as possible, using a blotting rather than a wiping motion. Never lay damp cloths on a wooden surface as wood will absorb this moisture. Avoid using a plastic tablecloth on a wood surface. The heat and humidity trapped by the plastic will mar the finish.
4. Use protective pads or glue pieces of leather or felt to the bottom of accessories to avoid scratching the wood. Lift objects to move them rather than dragging them over the finished surface.
5. Avoid burning finishes. Use pads under hot dishes. Provide ash trays for those who smoke.
6. Use a soft, lint-free absorbent cloth for cleaning and polishing wood furniture. Be sure all buttons and seams have been removed to avoid marring the surface. Do not use cheese cloth since this may contain an abrasive starch.
7. When dusting, waxing, or making minor repairs, always work with the grain of the wood.
8. Always pre-test a product on an inconspicuous part of the furniture before using for the first time. Be sure to read and follow all directions and warnings before using any commercial cleaner, polish or wax.

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