

Timber Floor Care Guide

How to clean, protect and maintain your timber floor so it looks great for decades

A well-maintained timber floor will outlast almost any other floor covering. The finish on top of the timber -- not the timber itself -- is what takes the daily wear, so caring for a timber floor really means caring for its finish. This guide covers the simple habits that protect it, the cleaning routine that keeps it looking new, and the things that quietly destroy it.

The First Weeks After Coating

If your floor has just been sanded and coated, the finish needs time to fully harden (cure), even once it feels dry.

- **24 hours:** light foot traffic in socks is fine. No shoes, no pets.
- **48-72 hours:** furniture can be carefully placed back -- lift it into position, never drag it.
- **7-14 days:** the finish reaches full hardness. Until then, no rugs or mats (they trap solvents and can imprint or discolour the finish), no wet cleaning, and be gentle with the surface.

Water-based finishes generally cure in about 7 days; solvent-based and oil finishes can take 2 weeks or longer. If in doubt, ask your flooring contractor for the cure time of the product used.

Routine Cleaning

Dry cleaning -- the workhorse

Grit and dust act like sandpaper underfoot and are the number one cause of fine scratching and dulling. Removing them regularly does more for your floor than anything else.

- Sweep with a soft broom, dust with a microfibre flat mop, or vacuum using the **soft brush head** (never a rotating beater bar) -- once or twice a week in normal homes, more often in busy areas or homes with pets.

Damp cleaning -- when it needs more

- Use a **well wrung-out** microfibre mop -- damp, never wet. Water should never pool or sit on the floor.
- Use a **pH-neutral timber floor cleaner** made for your finish type (for example Bona, Loba or a similar dedicated wood-floor cleaner), diluted as directed. These lift dirt without leaving residue or attacking the finish.
- Wipe up any remaining moisture; the floor should be touch-dry within a minute or two of mopping.
- Frequency: fortnightly to monthly is plenty for most homes -- only damp-mop when dry cleaning is no longer enough.

Never use on a timber floor

- **Steam mops** -- steam forces moisture into the joints and under the finish, causing peeling, whitening and swelling. Steam damage is not repairable by cleaning.
- **Wet mopping / bucket-and-string mop** -- excess water swells and cups boards.
- **Vinegar, ammonia, bleach, methylated spirits or all-purpose cleaners** -- they dull and etch the finish over time.
- **Silicone or oil-based supermarket polishes** (sprays that promise "shine") -- they build a smeary layer that contaminates the floor and can prevent it from ever being recoated properly.
- **Abrasive pads, scouring powder or harsh scrubbing.**

Everyday Protection

- **Mats at every entry** -- a good-quality mat outside and inside each external door stops most grit before it reaches the floor. Avoid rubber-backed mats, which can trap moisture and discolour the finish; choose breathable backings.
- **Felt pads under everything** -- chairs, tables, sofas, beds. Check and replace them every few months; a worn pad with grit embedded in it scratches worse than no pad.
- **Lift, never drag** furniture and appliances. For heavy items, use trolleys with clean rubber wheels or slide on carpet offcuts (pile down).
- **Office chairs:** use a chair mat, or fit soft polyurethane castors -- standard hard castors chew through finish quickly.
- **Shoes:** stiletto and damaged heels dent even hardened timber; grit caught in soles scratches. A shoes-off habit noticeably extends finish life.
- **Pets:** keep claws trimmed; place a mat under food and water bowls.
- **Spills:** wipe up immediately with a slightly damp cloth, then dry. Never let liquid stand -- especially near joints.
- **Rugs:** use breathable, non-staining underlay. Move rugs occasionally so the floor ages evenly.

Sunlight, Heat and Humidity

- **UV light** changes timber colour over time -- most species darken or mellow, some fade. Rotate rugs and furniture occasionally, and use curtains, blinds or window tinting on harsh western sun to keep colour change even.
- **Timber moves with the seasons.** Small gaps appearing between boards in dry months and closing in humid months are normal, not a fault.
- Aim to keep indoor relative humidity roughly between **40% and 60%**. Prolonged extremes -- heaters and air-conditioning running dry all winter, or persistent damp -- can cause gapping, cupping or squeaks. Avoid directing heating vents straight at the floor.
- **Indoor plants:** always use a waterproof tray under pots -- slow leaks are a common cause of black water stains.

Know Your Finish

Most timber floors carry one of three finish families. The daily routine above suits all of them, but their long-term care differs.

Finish type	How to tell	Long-term care
Polyurethane / lacquer (most common)	A sealed film on top of the timber; sheen from matt to gloss; water beads on the surface.	Clean as above. A dedicated polish/refreshers can be applied occasionally to renew sheen and cover fine scratches. Recoat (light sand and a fresh coat) every 5-10 years in homes, before wear breaks through.
Oiled / penetrating oil	Natural, matt, "close to the timber" look; the grain feels more open; water darkens the spot briefly rather than beading.	Needs periodic re-oiling with the maker's maintenance oil (often every 1-2 years in busy areas) -- little and often is the rule. Use only cleaners made for oiled floors; ordinary cleaners strip the oil.
Hard-wax oil	Similar natural look to oiled, slightly more sheen and water resistance.	Clean with the maker's soap/cleaner. Refresh worn areas with maintenance wax or oil as needed -- spot repairs blend in well, which is a key advantage of this finish.

Match the product to the finish

Cleaners, refreshers and maintenance oils are finish-specific. A polish meant for polyurethane will sit on an oiled floor as a smear, and a soap for oiled floors leaves residue on lacquer. When in doubt, ask your flooring contractor what finish is on your floor and stick to one compatible care system.

Long-Term Maintenance: Recoat Before It Wears Through

Finishes wear gradually -- first losing sheen in traffic paths, then thinning, and finally wearing through to bare timber (grey, fibrous-looking patches). The golden rule:

A recoat is cheap. A re-sand is not.

While the finish is intact, a maintenance recoat -- a light abrade and one or two fresh coats, done in a day with no bare timber exposed -- restores full protection. Once wear breaks through to raw timber, the boards stain and grey, and the only fix is a full re-sand and refinish. Watch your traffic paths (hallways, kitchen work zones, doorways) and book a recoat when they turn noticeably dull or scratched. Typical recoat intervals: every 5-10 years for family homes, more often for rentals and commercial spaces.

Note: floors that have been treated with silicone-based supermarket polishes often cannot be recoated (the new coat won't adhere) and must be fully re-sanded instead -- another reason to avoid those products.

Quick Troubleshooting

Problem	Likely cause and what to do
Fine scratches and dull traffic paths	Grit underfoot. Increase dry cleaning, check mats and felt pads. A refresher coat or maintenance recoat restores appearance.
White marks or cloudy patches	Moisture trapped in or under the finish (steam mop, wet mopping, standing water). Stop wet cleaning; marks may fade as they dry out -- persistent marks need professional attention.
Black or dark stains around a spot	Water has reached the timber (pot plant, leak, pet accident). Usually requires sanding or board replacement -- act early.
Smeary film that never looks clean	Residue from unsuitable cleaners or silicone polish. Switch to a pH-neutral wood floor cleaner; heavy build-up may need professional deep cleaning.
Gaps between boards in winter / dry weather	Normal seasonal shrinkage. Manage indoor humidity; gaps usually close as humidity returns.
Cupped (dished) boards	Moisture from below or excess surface water. Find and fix the moisture source first -- boards often flatten once dry.

The Short Version

- Dust or vacuum (soft head) once or twice a week -- grit is the enemy.
- Damp mop only when needed, well wrung out, with a pH-neutral timber floor cleaner.
- No steam mops, no wet mopping, no vinegar, no silicone polishes. Ever.
- Mats at doors, felt pads under furniture, wipe spills straight away.
- Protect from harsh sun; accept small seasonal gaps as normal.
- Use care products made for your finish type.
- Recoat traffic areas before the finish wears through -- it is a fraction of the cost of re-sanding.

This guide provides general care advice for finished timber floors. Always follow the specific instructions of your finish manufacturer and flooring contractor, and test any cleaning product in an inconspicuous area first.