

11 Flooring / Hardwood

Hardwood Flooring Introduction

Hardwood flooring is a term used to describe flooring products that include traditional hardwoods, such as oak and cherry, as well as bamboo (actually from the grass family) and engineered hardwoods. These natural products perform differently from one another.

Hardwood flooring is highly susceptible to changes in indoor relative humidity which in turn causes dimensional changes (shrinking or swelling). The width of a space between boards should be measured during the warmer, more humid months.

Homeowners have a responsibility to maintain indoor humidity levels through proper humidification and ventilation. The first two years are especially critical for fine woods to normalize to climatic conditions in a home.

Areas around heat registers and areas exposed to concentrated sunlight may be more susceptible to shrinkage. Broader strips of dimensional lumber are more prone to warping and cracking than narrower hardwood strips, and darker colour hardwoods floors with low gloss finishes and complex grain patterns are more visually forgiving.

The homeowner's selection of species, colour, board width, sheen, and layout pattern are factors of considerable importance.

Hardwood is wood harvested from broadleaf trees as opposed to softwoods harvested from trees with needle-like leaves or evergreens. The term "hardwood" does not necessarily relate to the hardness or impact resistance of the wood. Technically, balsa wood is a hardwood but it has very low impact resistance.

Each hardwood floor is a unique assembly of natural woods. Naturally occurring changes in hardwood flooring should be considered inherent to the character of the floor. That character is often why hardwood is selected over other manufactured options such as laminates. When homeowners are selecting their hardwood they should consider the governing hardwood specification and the grading rules that apply to that grade, rather than a small showroom sample which may not be indicative of the larger floor surface.

Hardwood flooring manufacturers abide by established rules for grading and marketing their product.

Any hardwood floor can be scarred by high-heel shoes or other seemingly innocuous point loads.

11.1 Cracks are developing between strips of hardwood.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood strip flooring shall be installed tight. Gaps exceeding 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) over the length of a board is considered excessive.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Abutting edges that remain open in the warmer months and exceed the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Hardwood flooring will be installed as per the manufacturer's instructions.

Improper humidity levels within the home can cause shrinkage to hardwood flooring. Maintaining humidity levels is the responsibility of the homeowner. Gaps due to improper homeowner maintenance are not covered.

Notes:

11.2 Strip hardwood flooring is cupped (high edges) or crowned (high centre).

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Strip hardwood flooring shall be installed as per the manufacturer's instructions and without distortions like cupping or crowning.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood boards not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Cupping and crowning is attributed to virtually any measure of bulk water made available to any unfinished side of the board, including moisture from excessive wet mopping or humidity rising from a lower level (i.e., a basement laundry area).

Improper humidity levels within the home can cause expansion of hardwood flooring. Maintaining proper humidity levels is the responsibility of the homeowner. Cupping or crowning due to improper homeowner maintenance is not covered.

If the condition is acute and the proper humidity levels are re-established and maintained, the flooring may return to its original condition without further remediation.

Notes:

11.3 Wood flooring buckles and detaches from substrate.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood flooring shall be fastened to the substrate in accordance with manufacturer’s requirements.

Wood flooring shall be installed to accommodate normal expansion and contraction.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood flooring not meeting the acceptable performance condition warranty shall be replaced.

Remarks:

Improper humidity levels within the home can cause buckling of hardwood flooring. Maintaining proper humidity levels is the responsibility of the homeowner. Buckling of hardwood flooring due to improper homeowner maintenance is not warrantable.

Damage caused by lack of proper ventilation or exposure to bulk water is warrantable.

Where repairs are required, colour, finish, or texture may not have an exact match.

Notes:

11.4 The surface of one strip of hardwood flooring is higher than another (i.e., overwood or underwood condition).

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Strip hardwood flooring shall be installed to provide a finished surface that is generally uniform in elevation.

Hardwood floors shall be installed where adjacent strips have no more than a 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) difference in elevation.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood flooring not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Hardwood floorings incorporate an interlocking design that virtually assures that each board establishes proper elevation from the adjacent board. In some instances the builder may alter the tongue or grove detail to facilitate a perimeter detail. In such cases the builder is responsible for re-establishing the general floor elevation and affix the detail properly.

Transition strips bridge differences in elevation and are not considered defects.

Some floor tiles are designed with irregular finished surfaces or irregular edge detailing, which may exaggerate the aesthetic appearance of the condition. Where hardwood wood surface exhibits irregularity by design or homeowner request, the condition is an aesthetic choice and not a defect.

Notes:

11.5 Hardwood flooring colour, sheen, or finish is not uniform.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Within a room or defined area, hardwood flooring colour, sheen and finish shall appear generally uniform when viewed from a normal viewing position under normal lighting conditions.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood flooring not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Approximately 90% of hardwood flooring sold is pre-finished in a controlled factory environment. Pre-finished hardwood offers a more consistent sheen and finish.

Site-finished hardwood floors are dependent upon the home environment and manual application methods. Minor differences in sheen are more common to site-finished flooring.

Each hardwood floor is a unique assembly of natural woods. That character is often why wood is selected over other manufactured options that are more uniform in appearance. Natural variations in hardwood flooring should be considered inherent to its character. Within each annual growth ring of a tree there exists springwood and summer wood, which is respectively lighter and darker. Stain intentionally accents these differences, and colour may vary considerably even within the same length of board.

Notes:

11.6 Colour variation, knots and different grain patterns exist within the finished floor.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Finished flooring shall not exhibit excessive colour variations. Knots and different grain patterns are acceptable within the specific grades and types of flooring.

Warranty Coverage:

This is not a defect.

Claim Response:

None.

Remarks:

Each hardwood floor is a unique assembly of natural woods. That character is often why real wood is selected over other manufactured options that are more uniform in appearance. Natural variations in hardwood flooring should be considered inherent to its character. The open grain in some wood surfaces tends to show a rough appearance, although the surface is still uniform.

Light itself, particularly direct sun light, will cause a change in colour over floor areas, specifically between covered and uncovered areas. Bamboo and cork flooring will fade in colour quickly while others, such as cherry, will darken over time.

At commencement of warranty, the floor should be evaluated for cosmetics as well as the quality of installation.

Notes:

11.7 Finish on hardwood flooring has blistered, peeled, or bubbled.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Site-applied or factory-applied finish on hardwood flooring shall not blister, bubble, or peel when properly maintained and used under normal conditions.

Isolated air bubbles not resulting in detachment of the finish are acceptable.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Flooring not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Sand, abrasives and dirt may prematurely attack the finish of fine hardwood floors. Homeowners are responsible for sweeping and vacuuming abrasive debris and protecting traffic areas with area rugs or floor mats.

Damage caused by excessive wear and tear, chemical attack, or improper maintenance is not covered.

Notes:

11.8 Hardwood flooring contains too many short boards and not enough long boards.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood flooring shall meet the manufacturer’s product specification for board lengths. Generally, wider boards are shorter in length as dictated by the diameter of the tree.

Warranty Coverage:

This is not a defect.

Claim Response:

None.

Remarks:

Board length varies depending on board width, manufacturer and grade. In lesser grades of wood floors, short boards may be more prevalent. This is not a defect, but a product selection issue, and is therefore not covered under warranty.

Notes:

11.9 Splinters are occurring in hardwood flooring.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood finished flooring shall be free of splinters.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Splintered hardwood flooring damaged during installation shall be rectified.

Splintering attributed to the manufacturing process shall be rectified.

Delaminating of solid or engineered hardwood flooring shall be rectified.

Remarks:

Splinters discovered at regular intervals may indicate an issue with the nailing or stapling operation during installation.

Damage resulting from improper maintenance and abuse is not a defect.

Notes:

11.10 Hardwood flooring is dented.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood flooring shall be generally free of impact dents unless otherwise designed.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood flooring not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified unless noted during the walk-through inspection. Issues noted on the walk-through inspection are contractual matters that should be resolved by the builder and homeowner.

Impact dents resulting from actions of the homeowner are not covered.

Remarks:

Hardwood refers to the species of tree, not the impact resistance of the wood. There is a wide range of hardness among tree species, even among those referred as, "hard woods." Grain pattern and finish colour can affect the visibility of imperfections. Light coloured wood with a clear grain structure, such as birch, will show impact damage more readily than a strongly patterned wood such as oak.

All wood floors can be scratched, gouged, or dented. Sharp or pointed objects, severe impact, or concentrated weight can mar floor surfaces, i.e., stiletto-heeled shoes can focus the weight of a 125 pound person to more than 2,000 pounds per square inch and damage hardwood flooring.

Notes:

11.11 Hardwood flooring squeaks.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood flooring shall be generally free of squeaks that are repetitive, consistent and readily audible under normal loading conditions.

Warranty Coverage:

1 year for defects in materials and labour.

Claim Response:

Hardwood floors not meeting the acceptable performance condition shall be rectified.

Remarks:

The builder strives to provide a squeak-free hardwood floor at commencement of warranty. However, as the home matures and the hardwood floor normalizes to its surroundings, it is possible for a new squeak to make itself known.

Within the warranty period the builder may correct the squeak by installing additional nails or screws connecting the hardwood flooring to the substrate. In this instance, face nailing may be used. Any new fasteners installed by the builder shall be countersunk and appropriately filled to blend the repair. Minor colour variations in rectified areas are considered acceptable.

Extended low-humidity indoor environments can cause excessive shrinkage in the wood flooring resulting in loose connections between flooring boards. The homeowner shall maintain indoor humidity levels to prevent excessive drying of materials.

A squeak-free floor may not be attainable and minor squeaks are not a defect.

Damage to hardwood flooring caused by improper humidity levels within the home is excluded from the warranty.

Notes:

11.12 Hardwood flooring bevel is uncomfortable underfoot.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

The bevel of the hardwood flooring shall be sized according to the grade and design of the hardwood flooring. This is a contractual matter involving a specific design feature of the chosen hardwood.

Warranty Coverage:

This is not a defect.

Claim Response:

None.

Remarks:

Bevel design is per the manufacturer’s specification.

The bevel on pre-finished hardwood flooring has several functions:

- Helps minimize the appearance of vertical displacement between hardwood strips.
- Helps minimize the appearance of seasonal variation in the gaps between boards.
- Helps minimize splintering along the most vulnerable edge of the board.

Hardwood floors that do not appear to feature bevels are likely site-sanded and site-finished. The larger the bevel and narrower the board, the more apparent the feel of the strip flooring underfoot. The appearance of the bevel can become more noticeable over time on lighter coloured floors such as birch.

Notes:

11.13 Hardwood floor finish (sheen) seems dull.

Acceptable Performance Condition:

Hardwood floor finish may be dulled by the application of cleaners.

Warranty Coverage:

This is not a defect.

Claim Response:

None.

Remarks:

Acid or base solutions, chlorine cleaners or abrasives will, over time, impair the finish of hardwood flooring and void the manufacturer’s warranty. Vinegar is acidifying and will dull polyurethane finished flooring. Homeowners are cautioned against using commonly available cleaners, soaps, oils, waxes or polishes on hardwood floors. Consumer dissatisfaction with such cleaning products is typically limited to the return of the product purchase price and not the consequential damages that may arise from using the product, even though it may be advertised as “safe” for hardwood floors.

Hardwood manufacturers recommend specific cleaning regimens that the homeowner is to comply with to maintain the warranty protection offered by the manufacturer; this is a homeowner maintenance issue.

Hardwood floors should be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. Inappropriate cleaning techniques can damage hardwood flooring materials.

Notes:
