

FACT SHEET

WOOD STAINING

Stains are used to colour wood and emphasise its grain. They can be used to make the colour of one type of wood match another or to tint patched areas to match the rest of the piece. Stains should only be used on bare, smooth, clean and dry wood.

Of the many stains on the market, there are three that seem to be the most popular: penetrating resin stains; pigmented oil or wiping stains; and water-based stains. The first is a clear resinous coating that sinks deep into the wood darkening the appearance of the natural wood. Simply apply it generously to the surface with a cloth or brush, let it soak for 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the darkening effect desired, and then wipe off the excess with a clean cloth. As penetrating resin is also a finish, a coat of wax is all that is necessary once it is dry.

Pigmented oil or wiping stains are more controllable. If the wood becomes too dark it can be lightened with minimum effort by rubbing with turpentine while still wet, or by sanding when dry. Before using an oil stain, clean the surface with a cloth dampened in turpentine or mineral spirits. Apply the stain with a brush or a cloth and after five or ten minutes wipe off the excess with a clean cloth. Let it dry for at least 24 hours before refinishing.

Water-based stains dry very quickly and can be applied indoors as they have little, if any, odour. Clean up is easy and these products contain much lower levels of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) than solvent-based products, which is much better for the environment.

The disadvantages of water-based stains and finishes, that most woodworkers complain about, is the lifting of the grain. The reason wood grains "lift" is because the wood fibre can absorb some of the water from the stains, making them swell, and, thus, leaving a slightly rough finish after the stains have dried. There is no magic bullet to fix this as it has to do with the mechanics of water molecules versus wood molecules.

The solution, in most cases, is to lightly sand after the staining, then finish with a water-based clear coating. You may have to re-sand slightly after the first and, maybe, even the second clear coating, but the finished work will be well worth your efforts for the final finish you will receive. So if you haven't tried some of the new water-based stains, try them. You will probably be pleasantly surprised and may open new doors to finishing techniques in the future.

Remember these tips as you begin:

- 1 follow the manufacturer's directions closely;
- 2 stain and wipe one full section or panel at a time;
- 3 do less conspicuous areas first, saving the front faces and top for last;
- 4 in the final clean-up, wipe in the direction of the grain;
- 5 since end grain wood will absorb a far greater amount of stain than other surfaces, wipe it with linseed oil or a clear coating first, to slow down absorption.