

FAQ For Soft Woods (Pine, Fir, Juniper, Redwood, Spruce)

PINE is a light-colored, soft wood with a medium texture and closed grain. Easy to work and less expensive than most hardwoods, it is the wood most often used by do-it-yourselfers to make shelves and furniture. It is also commonly used to manufacture unfinished furniture. Although pine is easy to cut and shape, it can be difficult to finish because it is easily scratched and dented and tends to soak up finishes.

Dents/Sanding Marks

Dent removal calls for a different technique. Place one or two drops of water in the dent and cover it with a damp cloth. Wait a few minutes to allow the drops to penetrate, then place the tip of a hot iron (set on "cotton") on the cloth. The heat from the iron will turn the water into steam, swell the fibers and raise the dent. For deep dents, you may have to repeat this trick two or three times.

Prepping/Sealing

The concept is simple. The percentage of solids in the sealer determines how completely the pores in the wood are sealed. If the wood was sealed completely, it would be difficult to get any stain to stick. Diluting the sealer with mineral spirits allows you to experiment with different degrees of sealing. When you apply the stain (Photo 2), you'll see the results. Then you can choose the dilution rate that delivers the best results for your project.

Let the sealer dry for a few hours. Then sand the wood lightly with 220-grit paper before applying stain.

An inexpensive turkey baster is a great tool for measuring small amounts of finish and mineral spirits. Mark the baster with a permanent marker. Just draw out equal amounts of sealer and solvent to make a 50 percent solution. We used disposable plastic cups as mixing containers.

Staining

Staining pine can be frustrating because it sucks up the color at different rates creating a mottled surface. For this reason, pine is often called a "blotch-prone wood." Many woodworkers avoid this problem by not using any stain. They

simply apply a clear finish, like polyurethane.

If you want to stain, it's best to apply a sealer first. Sealers are brush-on liquids that penetrate into the wood to limit the amount of absorption. It is difficult to tell how much sealer should be used because different products produce different results. The end grain of boards is particularly absorbent and may need a few coats of sealer so the end matches the surface color. At Toscano Interiors, we use a gel stain for softer woods, since these have a high concentration of pigment.

To be on the safe side, test the sealer and stain on some scrap wood or on an inconspicuous part of the finished piece. The sealer will make the wood less absorbent and the color will be lighter than indicated on the can. You can either apply additional coats of stain or switch to a darker hue. After applying the stain, let it dry for at 24 hours before applying the final finish.

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