

finishing room

never-fail

Oil and Wax Finish

When you can't face the finish, call on linseed oil and paste wax to do the job.



▲ The supplies you'll need to gather for an oil and wax finish couldn't be much simpler. And applying the finish won't send you into a panic.

I think every woodworker has, at one time or another, felt the "fear of finishing." You take the last clamp off of a project and it looks great, but you just know the finishing gremlins are waiting to mess up your hard work. Well, when you find yourself in this situation, I have an answer. Treat yourself and your project to a boiled linseed oil and wax finish.

An oil and wax finish is about as foolproof as any finish can get. As you'll see, it's so easy you can practically apply it in your sleep. And the bonus is the thin protective film you create lets the natural beauty of the wood shine through.

TWO PARTS. The secret to an oil and wax finish is how the two parts work together. First, the boiled linseed oil soaks into the wood to give it a warm glow and create a thin

protective layer. The color and figure of cherry, walnut, maple, and even oak will really "pop" after just a single coat of linseed oil.

But the oil alone has no shine. And that's where the wax enters the picture. A thin coat of paste wax rubbed on over the oil and then buffed out will add another layer of protection and leave a soft sheen that can't be beat.

GIVE IT A GO

Applying an oil and wax finish couldn't be much simpler. But like anything, there are a few tricks to it.

SMOOTH SURFACE. Since an oil and wax finish is very thin, what you see on the surface of the wood is what you get. This means you need to start with a really smooth surface. And all this takes is some

thorough sanding (220 grit does the job). And when I set down the sandpaper, I give the project a good going over with a tack cloth.

WIPE ON THE OIL. Now the “easy” work begins. Dip a pad of #0000 steel wool into a jar of boiled linseed oil and start rubbing it into the wood (top right photo). A soft cloth will also do the job, but I prefer steel wool. It holds the oil well and its fine, abrasive action allows me to really work the oil in.

You want to flood the surface with the oil and then rub it in with a vigorous circular motion. When the project is thoroughly covered you can relax for a bit. Give the oil 10 or 20 minutes to soak into the wood. As this happens, you’ll start to see the surface dull down.

WIPE IT OFF. After this short wait, just take a soft cloth and wipe off any excess oil left on the surface (middle right photo). I try to be pretty thorough and get into all the corners and recesses.

MORE OIL. If conditions are good (dry and warm), the oil will be dry enough to recoat in a day. If the surface still feels tacky, wait a little longer. First, give the piece a quick rubdown with #0000 steel wool and then wipe on a second coat just like you did the first.

On the third day, you guessed it, more oil. You still won’t notice much build or sheen but that’s not what you’re after. You want the oil to soak in, not lay on the surface.

TIME FOR WAX. After the third coat of oil is dry, it’s time to bring up the shine with a coat of good quality furniture wax (I use a beeswax and carnauba blend like the *Briwax* shown in the lower right photo.)

The wax can go on with either a soft cloth or steel wool (bottom right photo). But unlike the oil, you want to apply the wax a little more sparingly. Just enough to leave an even layer on the surface.

The wax dries quickly. About as soon as you finish wiping it on, you start to buff it out with a soft cloth, or even better, a piece of lamb’s wool (top left photo). You’ll need to use a pretty vigorous circular motion for this job. The surface will feel a little tacky at first, but the more you rub, the easier your “buffer” will slide across the surface. And this is when you’ll see the magic. The surface of the wood will come to life and take on a subtle, soft sheen. When your buffer no longer grabs and the surface has an even sheen, you’re done.

Now you might wonder how well such an easy-to-apply, thin finish will hold up. Well, for projects that don’t get a lot of heavy wear and tear, I’ve found that it’s plenty durable. And a big plus is that, unlike thick film finishes, an oil and wax finish can be quickly repaired. To remove a scratch or watermark, simply rub off the wax with steel wool, sand if necessary, and repeat the simple process. **W**



▲ A jar of oil and a pad of steel wool are all you need to get started. Wipe on a heavy coat and let it soak in.



▲ The second step is just as easy. After giving the oil time to soak in, wipe off any “leftovers” with a soft cloth.



▲ A light coat of paste wax goes on over the third coat of oil. A soft cloth and a circular motion do the job.

One-Step Oil and Wax Finish

A while back, I came across an interesting recipe for an “all-in-one” oil and wax finish. Always on the lookout for new finishes, I decided to mix up a batch and give it a try.

This simple mixture called for equal parts (by volume) of three of the oldest finishing materials in the book — boiled linseed oil, turpentine and beeswax. You can melt the beeswax in a double boiler and add it to turpentine, but I just

shaved pieces off a block and let it dissolve overnight. After adding the linseed oil, you’ll have a mixture that looks a bit like varnish.

Apply the mixture just like you would straight linseed oil — wipe it on and then wipe off the excess. After several coats, you can buff out the surface. I found that you only get a low sheen from this mix, but it has a nice look and the process sure was easy.

