

How to protect wood floors from inclement weather

Wood floors are a worthwhile investment that can improve the beauty and function of just about any room in a home. Even though wood floors are durable, and new protective treatments help seal out many of the things that may have damaged floors in the past, homeowners still need to prioritize protecting their hardwood floors.

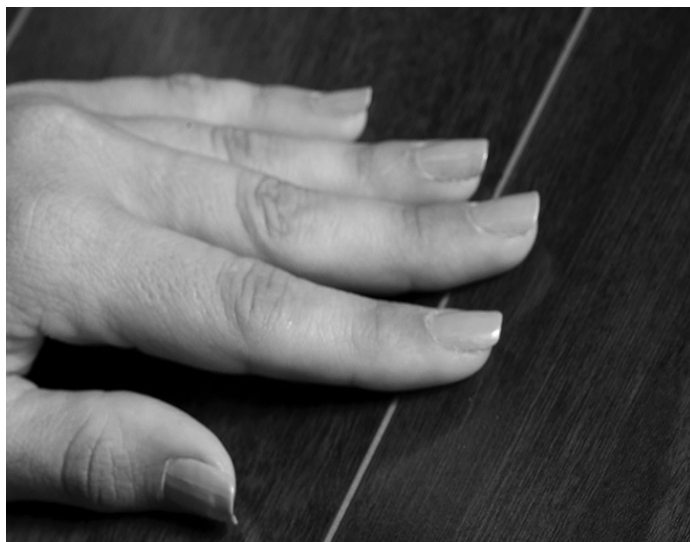
Certain seasons of the year can be more harsh on wood floors than others. For example, seasons characterized by moisture and precipitation, particularly the early spring, winter and fall, can be hard on wood floors. The experts at ServiceMaster Clean say that cold, snowy days can damage wood floors, and Lumber Liquidators agrees that winter weather can be harsh on flooring.

Homeowners need not give up on hardwood if they live in an area that sees all four seasons. They just need to take a few steps to keep floors looking beautiful.

- Clean up the salt. Salt that keeps sidewalks and streets clear of snow and ice inadvertently gets tracked inside a home. Hard chunks of salt can scratch wood floors, and, if left to sit, that salt can eventually cause white marks and other stains. Routinely vacuuming and sweeping up salt is necessary to protect wood floors.

- Invest in shoe storage. Wet or snowy boots can create puddles around the house. Have a special mat or tray by the front door where wet shoes can be kept. A nice bench in the entryway makes it easy for residents and guests to remove their shoes until it's time to go back outside.

- Use water-wicking mats. Homeowners will probably need a few extra mats around to tame errant drips and wipe shoes. Any entrance that might be used



by people or pets should be protected. Try to avoid petroleum-based, rubber-backed mats, as they could discolor the wood floor.

- Control humidity indoors. Cold, dry air in a home can be problematic because the moisture in the wood can eventually evaporate into the air. The heat will suck that moisture from the flooring, causing it to shrink, creak and splinter and become more brittle. Think about investing in an in-line humidifier for the home's HVAC system that can keep a moderate amount of humidity in the home. Hardwood floorboards are installed to accommodate minor temperature and humidity fluctuations. This is typically a range of between 60 and 80 degrees F with a relative humidity range of 35 to 55 percent, advises ServiceMaster.

- Use the right cleaning products. Avoid excessive water to clean wood floors, and select soaps that are specially designed for wood flooring. Consult with the flooring manufacturer for a list of detergents that are safe to use.

With proper care, hardwood flooring can survive rain, snow and cold weather.

Alarm Yourself Against Fire Risks

Follow these fire prevention tips to safeguard your home and family.

- Always remain in the kitchen while cooking, and keep things that can burn, such as towels, plastic bags or paper, at least three feet away from the stovetop.
- Store matches and lighters in a place where children cannot reach them.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet from curtains, newspapers and other things that can burn, and never leave heaters unattended.
- Have your chimney, furnace, fireplace and wood or coal stove inspected every year.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and inside or near every bedroom. Test alarms monthly, and replace batteries once a year.
- Develop and discuss a home fire escape plan with your family. Identify two exits from every room, and pick a meeting place outside the home.



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Safety renovations for seniors' homes

Feeling safe and secure at home is a priority for any homeowner. But safety is of particular concern for aging men and women who are at greater risk of being involved in accidents at home than younger men and women.

Harvard Health Publishing says that accidents at home are among the leading causes of injury and death in the United States. The chances for fatalities increases as one ages, and by age 75 and older, men and women are almost four times as likely to die in a home accident as people a decade younger. As people age, their balance, eyesight and general physical abilities can begin to diminish. Furthermore, a fall or incident that may only bruise a younger individual can cause more serious breaks or damage for seniors, resulting in potentially lengthy recovery times.

The Home Care Assistance organization says that one million elderly people are admitted to the emergency room for injuries every year. People concerned about the safety of their homes or the homes of their aging loved ones can retrofit such properties to make them safer.

Falls

According to The Senior Social Club, which offers care and community services to seniors, falls are the most common accidents affecting seniors. One out of every three seniors aged 65 and older falls at least once a year.

In addition to working with doctors to improve mobility and modify medications that may cause unsteadiness,

changes around the home can help. Grab bars placed in bathrooms and high-traffic areas can help seniors get stay more stable when changing from sitting to standing positions. Potential tripping hazards should be assessed. Area rugs without nonskid backings, clutter on floors, extension cords that extend into walking areas, and uneven flooring pose tripping hazards. Anti-slip coatings can be added to floors to reduce the risk of tripping. Poorly lit staircases and entryways also can contribute to falls. Consider the installation of motion-activated lighting so that dim areas can be automatically brightened when necessary. A night-light or LED lights placed near molding can help guide seniors to the bathroom during midnight visits.

Physical limitations

Arthritis can impede seniors' ability to turn on and off appliances, water faucets or handle certain kitchen tools. Kitchen and bathroom modifications can include the installation of ergonomic and user-friendly handles and spigots. Task lighting can make it easier to prepare meals, and appliances that automatically turn off after a

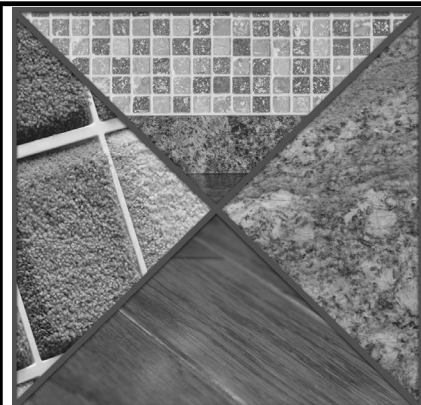
certain period of time can be a safety feature for forgetful individuals. Reorganize kitchen cabinets to make commonly used items as accessible as possible.

Smart Homes

Friends or family members can have greater control over seniors' homes by installing smart home systems. This way they can remotely adjust thermostats, control lights, view cameras, engage locks or alarm systems, and much more without having to be at the home. This can seniors allow seniors to maintain their independence while offering peace of mind to their loved ones. Certain home modifications can reduce seniors' injury risk.



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