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3 NO-FAIL FINISHES



from
WORKBENCH
Magazine

Get great-looking results with these simple finish recipes for maple, cherry, and oak.

Finishing can be one of the most intimidating parts of building a project. That's because the finish can make an otherwise perfect project fall flat, or turn a so-so effort into a thing of beauty.

The choice, then, when it comes to finishing, is often spending a lot of time experimenting to find the right effect, or just giving any finish a try and hoping for the best.

To make finding the right finish easier, I rely on my woodworking friends. We swap our "recipes" for finishes just as we might for meals. After all, why learn to cook something from scratch if a friend serves a version that suits your tastes?

Here, you'll find three of our best recipes for creating flawless finishes on some of our favorite woods: maple, cherry, and oak. And you'll be glad to hear that none of these recipes requires a pinch of this and a dab of that, or exotic ingredients that are difficult to obtain. Plus, all three finishes are easy to apply, so you won't have to worry about getting inconsistent results from piece to piece or project to project.

With all three, by the way, wood preparation is the same: Sand the wood through 220-grit, and then wipe away any excess dust before you apply the first coat.

Magnificent on Maple

When we built the home office suite of furniture, we wanted a wood with a fresh, clean appearance and a light tone. Maple proved the perfect choice. This wood's pale blond color and distinctive but subtle grain look great in any setting.

And, because there were five projects to build, we wanted a finish that would go on easily and dry quickly. Water-based finish fills the bill here. But there's one problem: Maple turns a cold, uninviting gray color under water-based finish.

That's where our shop craftsman, Steve Johnson, stepped in to suggest his favorite recipe for an easy maple finish. He starts with an oil-based

finish to add color, and then follows up with water-based finish to add protection and quickly build sheen (see the *Recipe Card*, below right).

Applying the Finish — After sanding the project, apply a coat of satin Arm-R-Seal from General Finishes (Fig. 1). This finish adds a hint of amber tone, thanks to the tung oil it contains. Add a second coat if you want more color.

Now apply a coat of Environment Friendly (EF) water-based finish, also from General Finishes (Fig. 2). It dries in just a few hours, after which you can sand lightly to smooth out any ridges or dust in the finish (Fig. 3). Then add two more coats, sanding in between to smooth the surface.



{ Oil finish gives maple a warm amber tone and makes the grain pop. Water-based topcoats applied afterward shorten finishing time.



{ Apply Arm-R-Seal with a foam brush. Wet the surface, and let the finish dry for eight hours.



{ Brush on the first water-based finish coat. The milky appearance disappears as the finish dries.



{ After the first coat of water-based finish dries (in two to three hours), sand the surface to get rid of any dust or raised wood fibers. Wrap 320-grit wet-or-dry paper around a wood block, and use light strokes.

RECIPE FOR MAPLE

Ingredients

- First coats: General Finishes Arm-R-Seal, satin
- Top coats: General Finishes EF Polyacrylic Blend, satin

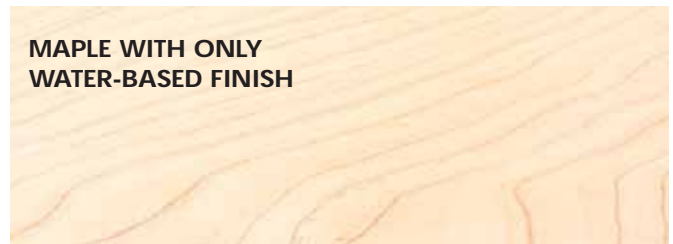
Application

Apply one or two coats of oil-based finish to add amber color. Follow up with three coats of water-based finish, sanding between coats with 320-grit sandpaper.

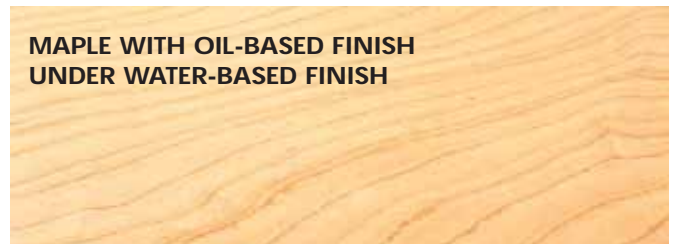
Sources

GeneralFinishes.com; 800-783-6050

MAPLE WITH ONLY WATER-BASED FINISH



MAPLE WITH OIL-BASED FINISH UNDER WATER-BASED FINISH





{ This warm, lustrous look usually appears only after cherry ages for several months. But this finish helps to jump-start the process.

RECIPE FOR CHERRY

Ingredients

- First coats: Tried and True Varnish Oil
- Top coats: General Finishes Arm-R-Seal, satin

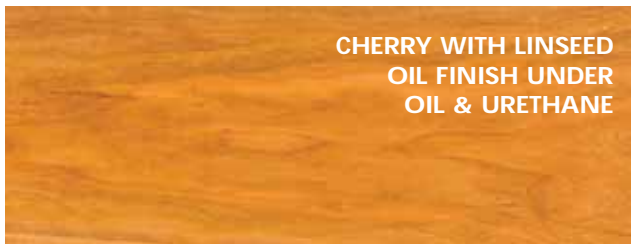
Application

Apply two coats of the Varnish Oil, allowing 24 hours drying time. Follow up with two coats of Arm-R-Seal

Sources

TriedAndTrueWoodFinish.com: 607-387-9280

GeneralFinishes.com: 800-783-6050



Our Choice for Cherry

Everyone loves the warm, reddish-brown color that is the hallmark of cherry. Unfortunately, freshly sanded cherry lacks this deep, lustrous tone. Instead, the wood is pinkish and tan.

The deeper tones don't appear until the wood has been exposed for months (or years) to the effects of ultraviolet rays from sunlight and oxidation from the air. That means you'll have to wait to get the cherry color you had in mind.

Or, you can stain cherry to give it that deep tone. But cherry absorbs stain unevenly, causing blotches. And the stain can obscure the grain.

To avoid these problems, Senior Project Designer Kent Welsh came

up with a two-step finish that speeds up the aging process. The secret is to use a finish that contains linseed oil. This oil has a deeper amber color than many others, so it creates that signature "cherry" tone quickly.

Applying the Finish — Kent starts with Tried and True Varnish Oil (see the Recipe Card, bottom left). Wipe on two thin coats as shown in Figure 1. (Note: You can get similar results using ordinary boiled linseed oil instead of the Varnish Oil.)

After these coats dry, scuff the surface to remove dust (Fig. 2). Then switch to General Finishes Arm-R-Seal oil and urethane top coat. It dries in 8 hours, so you can apply the two final coats in one day (Fig. 3).



{ Rub in the Varnish Oil, and wipe off excess after an hour. Add another coat 24 hours later.



{ After the second coat dries, use a "very fine" synthetic steel wool pad to remove imbedded dust.

> Use a foam brush to apply the Arm-R-Seal. Fully saturate the wood surface, and then let the finish dry. Follow up with two more coats, scuffing the surface in between with 320-grit sandpaper, or use a "fine" synthetic steel wool pad.





{ The open pores in oak often leave a pitted surface. Using wood filler, you can create a smooth surface that looks totally natural.

Outstanding on Oak

Oak remains one of the top choices for woodworking projects because it's readily available and reasonably priced. If there's a downside to oak, it lies in the wood's open pores that are especially visible in flatsawn stock. They can leave a pitted surface even after finishing.

One solution is to fill the pores with paste grain filler. But it can be a bit tricky to use.

That's why Senior Editor Dave Stone devised a downright simple recipe for grain filler that works great on oak. It requires only inexpensive water-based wood filler (meant for covering nicks and nail holes) that's available in hardware stores.

Make a Paste — Mix two parts “Golden Oak” Famowood Wood Filler (see the Recipe Card, bottom right) with three parts “Red Oak.” This creates a color that blends almost invisibly with the natural color of oak. Add water (just a few drops at a time), and stir to make a paste the consistency of sour cream.

Next, use a plastic putty knife to apply the paste to the wood (Fig. 1). Then scrape off any excess.

After the filler dries, sand the surface (Fig. 2). This removes all the filler except for what lodges in the pores.

Now finish the wood with Zar fast-drying polyurethane (Fig. 3). The oak will look natural, but will feel smooth as glass. 📺

RECIPE FOR OAK

Ingredients

- Filler: Famowood Golden Oak and Famowood Red Oak
- Finish: Zar Fast-Drying Polyurethane, satin

Application

Mix the filler and work into the wood pores with a putty knife. Sand excess filler when dry, and apply finish.

Sources

EclecticProducts.com; 800-767-4667 (Famowood)
UGL.com; 800-272-3235 (Zar)



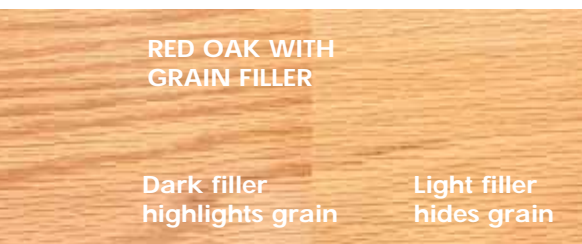
{ Spread the filler paste over the surface, and work it well into the wood surface to fill the pores.



{ After the filler dries, sand with 220-grit paper. Brush dust away, and wipe with a damp cloth.



RED OAK WITH UNFILLED GRAIN



RED OAK WITH GRAIN FILLER

Dark filler highlights grain

Light filler hides grain



< Apply two or three coats of oil-based finish to bring the wood back to life. (I used Zar Fast-Drying Polyurethane.) A foam brush or rag works best to prevent you from accidentally pulling any filler out of the pores. Sand between coats.