

Hardwood Flooring Finishes Comparison Table

Finish Type	Wear Resistance	Color Shift / Ambering	Odor / VOC During Install	Dry / Cure Timeline*	Recoat / Repair Path	Maintenance Cadence	Cost Band**	Look & Feel
Water-based polyurethane	High in 2K systems	Very low	Low	Recoat ~2-4 h • Light furniture ~24-48 h • Full cure ~7 d	Screen and recoat is predictable • Spot fixes can show	Low to moderate	\$\$	Clean, neutral film. Minimal ambering. Natural tone.
Oil-based polyurethane	High	Moderate to high over time	High	Recoat ~8-24 h • Full cure ~2-4 wk	Screen and recoat common • Spot fixes are visible	Low to moderate	\$	Warm amber film. Classic glow.
Moisture-cured urethane	Very high	Low to moderate	Very high	Fast initial set • Allow careful cure before heavy use	Strict windows • Future recoats can be demanding	Low once cured	\$\$\$\$	Tight, high-build film. Very crisp, hard look.
Acid-cured (Swedish)	Very high	Low to moderate	Very high	Same-day recoats possible • Full cure in weeks	Pro-only workflows • Recoats may need aggressive prep	Low once cured	\$\$\$	Premium, glassy film. Clear and sleek.
Aluminum-oxide UV (factory prefinished)	Excellent	Very low	Very low on site	No on-site cure • Walkability depends on install	Recoat later is often complex • Spot repairs are limited	Very low	\$\$\$	Very tough factory film. You will see board seams.
Hardwax oil	Moderate	Low to warm tone within system	Low	Touch-dry in hours • Light use ~24 h • Builds strength over ~7 d	True spot repair in minutes • No full resand for small fixes	Moderate periodic refresh	\$\$-\$\$\$	Natural, low-build feel. Wood texture stays alive.
Penetrating oil sealer	Moderate	Warm tone that deepens grain	Moderate	Often overnight to dry • Strength builds over weeks	Wipe-on refreshes • Later film finishes may need a full resand	Moderate periodic refresh	\$\$	Hand-rubbed warmth. Deep grain.

* Timelines vary by brand, coat count, temperature, and airflow.

** Cost band is a relative snapshot of materials plus typical labor. \$ is lowest and \$\$\$\$ is highest.



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