

USING A PRE-STAIN WOOD CONDITIONER



Several softwoods, and more porous hardwoods like maple, aren't conducive to stained finishes. This is because wood density and porosity may vary; causing some areas to absorb more stain than other areas, resulting in an undesirable blotchy finish. Other problematic woods may include pine, fir, hemlock, alder and birch.

It is recommended when working with new and bare woods, to use a pre-stain wood conditioner. The conditioner penetrates and temporarily seals the wood to even out the ratio of absorption, thereby creating a much more uniform stain coat. Many experienced woodworkers believe that standard liquid stains will produce the best results on pine, fir, alder, maple, birch and similar woods if the surfaces are pre-treated with a conditioner.

PREPARATION

Before applying the pre-stain wood conditioner, be certain that all blemishes have been addressed and all surfaces have been properly sanded. Gouges or scratches should be filled, and it's important to make sure any glue residue has been removed. Ideally, it is also recommended to finish with a light hand sanding for a perfect final touch.

Then, remove all sawdust with a shop vacuum and wipe the project with a dry cloth. Finally, use a tack cloth or clean cloth moistened with mineral spirits to clean off any remaining sawdust. A perfectly clean surface is critical to the success of the conditioner and the application of stain.

APPLICATION

Use a brush or cloth to apply a liberal coat of the pre-stain conditioner to all surfaces of your woodworking project. As with the stain you will soon apply, always work in the direction of the grain when applying the wood conditioner. Allow the conditioner to penetrate the wood for five to 15 minutes, and then wipe off any excess. As per the product instructions, you'll likely be advised to apply the stain within two hours of the application of the conditioner. If the stock appears to be excessively absorbent, a second coat of conditioner may be advisable. Then, clean up with mineral spirits or paint thinner.

It's important to apply the stain within the recommended window of time – from 15 minutes to about 2 hours of application of the conditioner. Woodworkers who allow the conditioner to dry beyond the two-hour window report that the conditioner loses all effectiveness and some even claim that the stained results can be even worse than if no conditioner was applied at all.

Finally, using a pre-stain wood conditioner will likely lighten the color of your stain to some degree, since the role of the conditioner is to slightly hinder the absorption of the stain. Be sure to test the stain on an inconspicuous spot before starting. You may find that you need to apply a second coat of stain to reach the desired colour, but the stain's colour will be much more even than if you had skipped the conditioner all-together.