

Hardwood Wood Floors: Performance, Expectations

One of the leading causes of customer dissatisfaction with their hardwood floor is that the floor does not live up to expectation. No matter how experienced the installer, how good an install that he/she performs or what the quality of the hardwood is; there are number of things that can be expected from a hardwood floor.

- **Hardwood Floors will dent:** the term "hardwood" is relative to "softwood" as far as a comparison in terms of hardness. Hardwood floor will dent from impact with "high heel" shoes, furniture sliding across the floor and even your pet's nails. No finish that is applied to the hardwood will prevent the dents but the finish must contour to the dent to protect the hardwood from moisture and household use. Scratching the finish with any abrasive or sharp object is not considered normal use or wear.

- **Hardwood is not a monochromatic product:** hardwood, since it is a natural product, will vary in appearance from one board to the next. It is not a manufactured product but is milled from kiln-dried wood that comes from a tree. It will have grain and color variations consistent with the grade and species of the selected hardwood flooring.

- **Hardwood may "gap":** although the hardwood floor "strips" may start tight together it will since it is a natural product, continue to absorb and release moisture. The "hygroscopic" process causes the hardwood to expand and contract from season to season with the changes of humidity in the environment. As a result, some gaps may appear between some of the individual boards in the floor.

It is critical to the performance of the hardwood floor that the house temperature remains between 65-75 degrees Fahrenheit and the interior house humidity be within the range of 35-55 percent moisture content.

- **Species characteristics:** each species of hardwood reacts differently to temperature, humidity, and sunlight and will continue to expand and contract at different rates as well darken and lighten as the UV rays from the sun react with the wood. Each Species has a different degree of hardness and will dent to varying degrees depending on the hardness of the species.

- **Maintenance of the floor:** each hardwood floor needs to be maintained on a regular basis to avoid excessive deterioration and damage to the finishes and the hardwood itself. Regular sweeping, vacuuming or mopping with a dry mop are recommended to assure that sand, grit and other debris do not damage the surface of the flooring. Damp mopping with manufacturer-approved cleaners is recommended to maintain the hardwood floor's original appearance and luster. Place a mat or area rug at all entries or high use areas to protect the floor's finish from excessive wear.

SUBMITTED BY GERALD RUPPER FROM FLOOR TO CEILING

Restore Your Property Once Winter Weather Is Gone

(MS) — Restoring a yard after a long winter is a springtime rite of passage for many homeowners. Harsh winds and heavy snow can take their toll on even the most beautiful landscape.

Spring is a homeowner's first chance to survey the damage and begin restoring the yard to where it was before all those strong winds and snowstorms. To get started on your yard this spring, consider the following tips.

- * **Don't begin too early.** The early bird might get the worm, but the early homeowner might get a damaged lawn. If temperatures for an upcoming free weekend are unseasonably warm, it's best to avoid doing spring yard cleanup until there have been several warm weekends to thaw the ground. Unless the ground has completely thawed, footsteps on the yard will damage the grass, compacting the soil and preventing the air and moisture that soil needs from doing its job and penetrating the soil. What's more, if the yard is raked before the ground has thawed, the rake might just be pulling the grass out by its roots.

- * **Survey the property.** A close survey of the property will give homeowners an idea of just how big or small their restoration project will be. A thorough survey will reveal any problem areas and may also reveal some unexpected guests. Rabbits and squirrels often nest in yards during the winter. Rabbits will nest in the ground, while squirrels typically build nests made of leaves in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

Spring marks the first opportunity for homeowners to inspect their yard and assess any property damage that might have resulted from harsh winter weather

trees. Unless it's entirely necessary, avoid removing any nests, and be sure to carefully inspect the yard before the season's first snow.

- * **Out with the old.** When the cleanup process is ready to begin, it's time to remove remnants from last season. This includes removing any dead plants as well as last year's mulch. If new mulch is simply thrown on top of old, plants could suffocate.

Dead leaves also tend to gather during the winter, often up against fences or a home's exterior walls. Rake up these dead

leaves and add them to the season's compost.

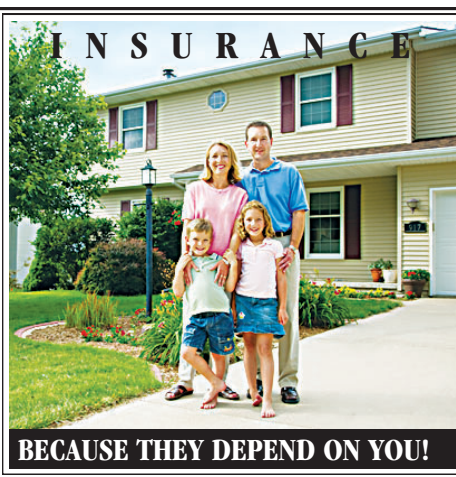
- * **Get rid of thatch.** Thatch can be soil's worst enemy, preventing its access to the sunlight, air and moisture it needs to make the lawn look beautiful and healthy. Thatch removal can be tiresome,

but visit the local hardware store and pick up a dethatching rake to make the job a little easier. Thatch removal isn't always necessary every spring. Many homeowners have found removing thatch every other year is effective enough.

- * **Aerate the yard to revive the soil.** Soil often becomes compacted as spring becomes summer and summer becomes fall. This is especially true of yards that are heavily used, be it by kids playing outdoors or families who love to host warm weather gatherings in the yard. Aerating in the spring removes plugs of sod from the soil, loosening it up and making it easier for air and water to reach the roots.

- * **Address those ugly bald spots.** Bare spots in a yard can result from any number of things, be it a dog urinating in the yard or even disease. Early spring, when temperatures are a little cooler and promote grass growth, is a great time to address the yard's bald spots. Do so by clearing away the spots and sprinkling the freshly exposed soil with some grass seed. Then add some fertilizer and be sure the newly seeded areas get some water until the new, healthy grass begins to grow in.

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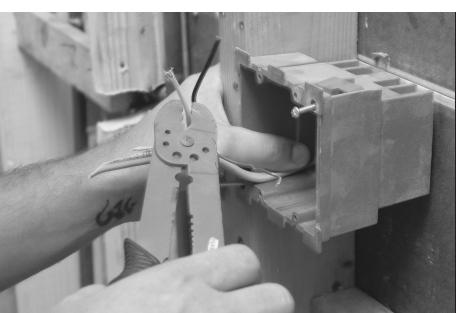
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