

Wooden worktop hardwood worktop care guide

Introduction

The timber worktop that you have selected is a natural, prestige, quality product made to the highest standards from environmentally sound and renewable sources. The appeal of timber lies in its inherent warm textures and natural variety of grain pattern and colour.

Ongoing care and oiling of the timber brings out and enhances its appearance as well as protecting the wood surfaces from wear and tear. This guide has been drawn up to explain how to use and look after your new timber worktop.

It gives some background information to explain why some things are so and explains how best to maintain the worktops for a lifetime of service. Please read the guide thoroughly and follow its advice. The effort put in now will be more than repaid in the long term.

Construction and appearance

Timber worktops are made from strips or staves of solid wood. These strips are cut, selected, graded and kiln dried to have a moisture level suitable for domestic interior use, before they are glued up into one homogenous panel.

The process, known as lamination, gives a stable, durable construction. It reduces the natural defects of the wood and ensures a more consistent colour and grain pattern. There will be some pattern, colour and grain differences over the timber surfaces. This is a normal and valued characteristic of the appearance of wooden products.

Please note that fresh new timber surfaces will weather over time as they are exposed to light. Items left for a period of time in one place will mask the timber, which will then show as a lighter area. If this is a problem, items should be moved regularly from place to place to stop the shading from occurring, until the surfaces are evenly weathered.

Timber moisture content & cross-grain movement

Timber is a natural material that responds throughout its life to changes in humidity and moisture in its environment. It absorbs or gives up its own moisture until it is in equilibrium with its surroundings.

When timber moisture content increases, the wood expands; when it dries, the timber shrinks. This change, called 'movement', occurs across the grain only. A worktop will become a little wider and narrower respectively. It is a normal characteristic of all timber.

Your supplier will have designed and installed the worktop with slotted fixings and gaps to accommodate this expansion and contraction. In use it is very important to avoid sudden large changes in environmental humidity and moisture since these put great stress on the mass of timber in the top; the wood needs time to adjust to change.

For example: - When the room heating is switched on seasonally, it should be turned up to temperature gradually, over a period of days. This will allow the timber worktops to acclimatise properly. Timber worktops should be wiped down with a sparing amount of water - not liberal sloshes of soapy water- and water should never be left to stand on wooden surfaces.

Guidelines for good use

Here are a few simple guidelines that need to be observed if the timber worktops and their surfaces are to give a lifetime of good service. -

Always mop up spills of water and other liquids straight away. Do not allow liquids to stand on wooden surfaces for any period of time. (The finishing oil is water resistant, not waterproof).

Always use pan stands and trivets to protect the timber from rough, hot, wet, dirty pots and pans. Direct contact from iron, steel or copper vessels can also stain the timber surfaces.

Always use cutting boards to chop and slice food. Do not cut directly onto the worktop surface.

Clean the tops with a sparing amount of warm water, a drop of washing up liquid and a well-rung cloth. It is important that Timber surfaces are re-oiled at regular intervals to remain in the same condition as when it was installed. The time span between oiling is dependant on the degree of use and wear they receive.

For example, a highly worked surface will need re-oiling more frequently than a showroom piece, possibly once a week once installed, gradually working into once a month (see surface care below). At the very least timber work surfaces should be re-oiled every three months.

Surface care

The surfaces of the timber worktops have been finished with a specially formulated oil (supplied): 3 coats on faces and edges, 5 coats on end grain.

The oil is formulated: to be safe for the preparation of food; to enhance the wood colour and grain pattern; to provide a durable, protective surface over the natural timber structure, whilst being easy to look after and restore when the surface becomes worn.

When the top is newly oiled and the surface is in good condition, it will have a sheen on it.

Splashes of water will form into properly defined droplets that stand up clearly.

After a period of use the finish will become worn; the sheen will diminish and the surface become dull. Water will not form into droplets as readily, but tend to spread out and wet the surfaces. This is a clear sign that the worktop needs re-oiling; in fact it is better to re-oil before the surfaces quite reach this condition.

The time taken for wear to occur depends on the amount of use the surfaces have had. In any one kitchen there will be high wear and low wear zones; the former will need more attention than the latter. The entire kitchen surface should be re-oiled regularly, at the very least every 3 months.

Applying worktop oil

The best time to re-oil is at the end of the day, when the freshly oiled surfaces can be left overnight without disturbance.

Tops must be clean and dry.

Apply worktop oil with a lint free cloth, folded into a pad. Dispense the oil from a bowl or saucer onto the areas to be treated. Apply the oil liberally at first, so that it stands and can soak in. Pay particular attention to, and work the oil well onto areas which will have had repeated wettings in use, e.g. edges and ends, around sink cut outs, into drainer grooves, the water stop and the areas around taps. After 30 minutes, wipe off the surplus oil with a clean cloth and leave it to soak in and dry naturally, overnight. Several thin coating applied in this way are far better than one liberal application. Parched areas may need successive oiling like this to restore the surface finish and sheen. If the surface develops any roughness after oiling it can be smoothed using a de-nibbing pad, (supplied). Work lightly, only in the grain direction. Wipe clean before re-oiling.

Re-smoothing the surface

From time to time the surface may become roughened as successive coats of oil are built up on low use areas. The build up can be removed by using a fine nylon abrasive pad and a little worktop oil, worked lightly in the direction of the wood grain until the surface is smooth wipe clean with a dry cloth and apply a coat of fresh worktop oil as above. Replacement quantities of the worktop finishing oil can be obtained from your local DIY store.

Repairs

Over time, with even the most careful use, the surfaces of the timber worktops are going to

acquire some cuts, scrapes, chips and stains. The minor ones will become blended in under successive coats of worktop oil, during normal maintenance.

More serious blemishes can be smoothed out and re-finished. Make sure that the worktop is totally clean and dry. Use 100 grit abrasive paper, then 150 grit paper and work in the direction of the grain only, with long, firm strokes to gently sand the damage out. layer of wood to leave a lighter coloured, dished area.

Take care not to sand deeper or farther than is necessary. The worktop's mature colour will start to come back when the oiling process is started, (3 coats on faces and ends, 5 coats on end grain) and will continue to recover within a few months to blend with the overall weathered colour of the timber.

Severe damage, judged to be too deep and too extensive to sand out as above can be repaired in a variety of other ways. Talk to an experienced joiner or cabinetmaker about how they could repair the damage, by cutting it away in order to let in a fresh piece to restore the surfaces and edges. Matching pieces of timber can be obtained via your kitchen supplier.

Cupping

The upper surface of the worktop, being the more exposed, usually, reacts first to change in moisture. Extreme changes can cause it to go out of balance with the underside and cause the timber worktop to 'cup'. If the upper surface is consistently wetter the top can rise in the middle. If the upper face is consistently drier than the underside, the top will 'dish'. The top will recover its flat shape when the two surfaces come naturally into balance with each other. If the cupping persists, it is a sign that something is seriously wrong and needs remedying

Possible causes are:

The top surface is being kept too wet

The top has been installed over a heater

Moisture is leaking from a pipe or built-under appliance.

The slotted fixing brackets and screws have not been fitted or have failed.

In all likelihood the top will recover gradually once the cause of the cupping has been solved. If not, it is advisable to contact a joiner or cabinetmaker to help with any rectification. Provided that the worktops have been specified, handled and installed in line with the specifying and installation guides, with use of the correct installation materials and fittings and adherence to the care & maintenance programme here.