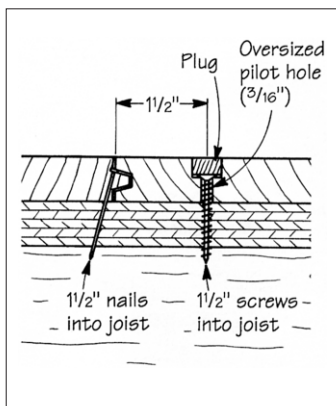


Taking the Twist Out of Wide Pine

by Henry Spies

Q. We build a lot of reproduction Colonial homes and have problems with wide pine flooring shrinking, warping, and splitting. What is the best way to control this?

A. There is only one way to control shrinking — use dry lumber. You should use a moisture meter to make sure that the flooring has no more than 11% moisture content. In order to get this, it may have to be ordered special from the drying kiln, or you can sticker and air-dry the flooring for several months before use. It used to be common practice to store flooring in the house at least 60 days before it was installed to allow the wood to come into equilibrium with the house.



To prevent splitting, secure wide pine flooring with 1/2-inch screws within 1 1/2 inches of each groove. Pre-drill oversized pilot holes for the screws to allow the flooring to expand and contract.

To prevent splitting, wide flooring should have tongue-and-groove or half-lapped edges. Toenail the board at the tongue (or bottom lap) and then drive a screw about 1 1/2 inches from the groove (or overlapping edge) along the joists. Pre-drill an oversized pilot for the screw (see illustration). The pilot hole should be several sizes larger than the screw shank to allow the wood to move on the screw without splitting. The counter-bored screw hole is then plugged for appearance.

Foam Under Floors

Q. Can I use rigid foam panels sandwiched between subfloor and finish floor to insulate over a crawlspace?

A. This can be done, but I would not recommend it. Movement of anything against polystyrene foam creates a terrible squeaking noise. Remember the last time a foam cooler rubbed against something in the back of your truck?

Except in the most extreme northern climates, insulating a floor over a crawlspace is questionable because you lose some of the cooling advantage. In the summer, there is considerable cooling by heat radiating from the floor to the soil.

The best way to insulate a crawlspace is to use foam on the stem walls. However, if you opt to insulate the floor cavity, all piping and ductwork must be insulated also. An inexpensive alternative, if there are

no ducts or pipes in the crawlspace, is to use a sheet of double-faced reflective insulation on the bottoms of the floor joists. Reflective insulation works well against downward heat flow, yielding up to R-11 if the air space above is tightly sealed.

Leveling Existing Concrete

Q. We need to level a concrete floor. Is there a way to grind or pulverize the old slab? Are there any other options?

A. A terrazzo grinder can grind the existing concrete smooth, if that is the finish desired. But this may be an expensive option if you will be covering the concrete with another finish material. Companies that specialize in terrazzo floors charge by the square foot, expecting this to be the finished floor.

If you don't mind increasing the floor elevation, the slab can be leveled with one of the many gypsum-based leveling mixtures, such as Gypcrete. There are also a number of epoxy concrete fillers available from industrial maintenance supply houses that might work. But these are made to create a super strong surface that can withstand heavy traffic from trucks or fork lifts, and are very expensive. ■

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