

# Hardwood Strip Over Vinyl

**Q.** *What's the right way to install hardwood strip flooring over an existing linoleum floor? The linoleum is glued to 5/8-inch plywood, which is installed over felt paper and a 1/2-inch plywood subfloor. The floor joists are 16 inches on-center.*

**A.** *Howard Brickman, a wood flooring consultant and contractor in Norwell, Mass., responds:* Since a vinyl floor is not likely to create a finish floor height problem, you can go ahead and install the floor over the linoleum — or vinyl, which it's more likely to be. If it is actually linoleum, you might want to consider pulling it up if it seems to break up when you nail into it. Be careful when lifting vinyl and linoleum — some products have an asbestos backing — another good reason to leave it in place. Also, an intact vinyl floor will provide an effective vapor barrier.

With the double layer of plywood, you should have a plenty stiff floor, and the thickness will provide good nail retention. Two-inch nails won't even protrude from the underside.

Install the hardwood floor as you normally would. I would first lay down a layer of 15-lb. felt to eliminate squeaks.

## Patching Stucco

**Q.** *When making a patch in stucco, is it possible to use hydraulic cement or a fast-setting cement for the first couple of layers so that the patch can be completed in one day?*

**A.** *Steve Thomas, a construction estimator in Columbus, Ohio, with many years' experience in the stucco trade, responds:* I would advise against either hydraulic cement or any "hurry-up" product for the base coats. The reason is simple: You can almost bet the surface you're attempting to patch (and match) was not created using these

products, but a less expensive, standard cement/lime/sand mixture.

The capillary suction of the undercoats — their tendency to absorb moisture from the finish coat — will directly affect the drying time and therefore the color of the top coat. The hard, fast-drying products you refer to are much less absorptive than a standard cement mix. Even if you use the exact same finish-coat recipe as the original, it will end up looking different over a fast-setting undercoat. Typically, the faster the stucco dries, the lighter the color will be.

If possible, seek out the original stucco contractor and try to get the recipe for his finish mix, to get you as close as you can to a perfect match. Even so, you'll have some difficult hurdles to overcome. Age and weathering tend to darken stucco colors. You may have to add more pigment to the recipe to account for this. Your best bet, depending on the size of the patch, may be to repaint that entire side of the house.

In general, it's not a good idea to rush stucco work. Put on the scratch coat one day, let it cure overnight, then put on the brown coat. The brown coat should be flat and held consistently about 1/8 inch below the surrounding finish coat. Irregularities in the brown coat will cause the finish coat to dry unevenly, and produce a mottled color as well as excessive cracking. For best results, leave the brown coat for a week before putting on the finish coat. This will minimize cracks in the top coat.

## Replacing Rotten Wood

**Q.** *I often encounter rot on joists and sills in my remodeling work, and have to sister on*

*new wood members to support the structure. Is it okay to leave some rotten wood in place, or must I remove it all?*

**A.** *Paul Fiset, director of the Building Materials and Wood Technology program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, responds:* Wood rots when it is attacked by rot fungi — living organisms that need four things to survive: food (wood), favorable temperatures (32°F to 100°F), water, and oxygen. If wood is rotting, you can stop the process by eliminating one of these four things.

Generally, the most effective approach is to keep the wood dry — below a moisture content of 22% (which corresponds to around 90% relative humidity). Once the wood is dry, the rot will go dormant, but it can reactivate when the moisture content again rises above 22%.

Before you sister joists onto wood with dormant rot, I would spray the existing wood with a product like Bora-Care. It is sold by Nisus Corp of Knoxville, Tenn. (800/264-0870; www.nisuscorp.com.) It's fairly inexpensive and will kill any fungi that are still on the wood. After you spray the wood (using a garden sprayer), be sure to dry the existing wood and take care of the conditions that led to wetting in the first place before adding the new wood.

**GOT A QUESTION?** Send it to On the House, JLC, 932 West Main St., Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to [jlc@bginet.com](mailto:jlc@bginet.com).

