

## Weighing the Pros and Cons of Exterior Wood Coatings

**W**hen it comes to coating wood, there's no definitive answer, no single product or even product category, that will suit everyone's needs. To help you make that decision, we offer Wood Finishes 101:

**VARNISHES:** One- and two-part varnishes are clear, hard coatings that show off the wood's natural beauty. They come in a variety of glosses, from the classic wet look to a matte finish, which is less slick and has less glare.

**Pros:** These will typically last longer than other types, requiring less frequent application and maintenance.

- They offer a more abrasion-resistant finish.
- Varnishes offer that classic, mirror-like look.
- Two-part systems are regarded as being more durable than single-parts.

**Cons:** Prep and application are more labor-intensive and require a more careful hand.

- They tend to show nicks and scratches more readily than low-gloss or matte finishes, and the hard barrier will blister if moisture migrates up through fastener holes.
- The hard coatings may crack or peel, requiring spot maintenance or—if not maintained well—stripping and re-applying.
- The super-hard shell makes touch-ups more laborious.

**SYNTHETICS AND STAINS:** Synthetics and stains come in a range of glosses, but even with an overcoat, will not achieve the wet look of a varnish. Many have added pigments

that can turn the wood red, yellow, or opaque brown.

**Pros:** Application is a breeze: They require fewer coats than varnish, dry faster, and require little or no sanding between coats.

- Some combine an oil-based bottom coat and a glossy sealer coat to offer the deep penetration of an oil and a hard varnish-like shell.
- They are more flexible than varnish.
- Their opaque nature and high solids content offer better protection from harmful UV rays than a clear varnish.

**Cons:** These softer finishes will need to be reapplied more frequently than varnish but less frequently than teak oils.

- Pigments can mask the wood's grain.

**TEAK OILS AND SEALERS:** What sets a teak oil and a teak sealer apart is the amount of solids in the product. Sealers usually have a higher percentage of solids than oils, offering better UV protection, and last longer than oils.

**Pros:** These are easy and fast to apply.

- They penetrate deep into the wood.
- The soft finish resists blistering and cracking and does not show nicks and scratches as easily as a hard coating.
- These make the most of teak's nonskid properties.

**Cons:** They do not last as long as other finishes, requiring re-application every three to four months.

- They lack the hard protection of varnish or a gloss overcoat.
- Some oils attract dirt and encourage mold and mildew growth as the coating fails.