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# Is Wood Laminate Flooring Real Wood? Here's What You Need To Know

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When it comes to replacing your flooring, laminate can be a good choice for some. There is a wide range of options available with laminates, and it has proven a durable and affordable material. But are wood laminate floors real wood flooring? We checked into this and have found the answer for you.

Laminate flooring isn't real wood flooring, although it does have a particleboard wood core. Only one of the several layers contains any wood at all. The layer that includes the wood-like appearance you see is a printed image, and the top-most layer is a durable transparent overlay for protection. At the base is a protective backing layer, which is also not made from wood. These layers are fused to create a single piece of laminate flooring.

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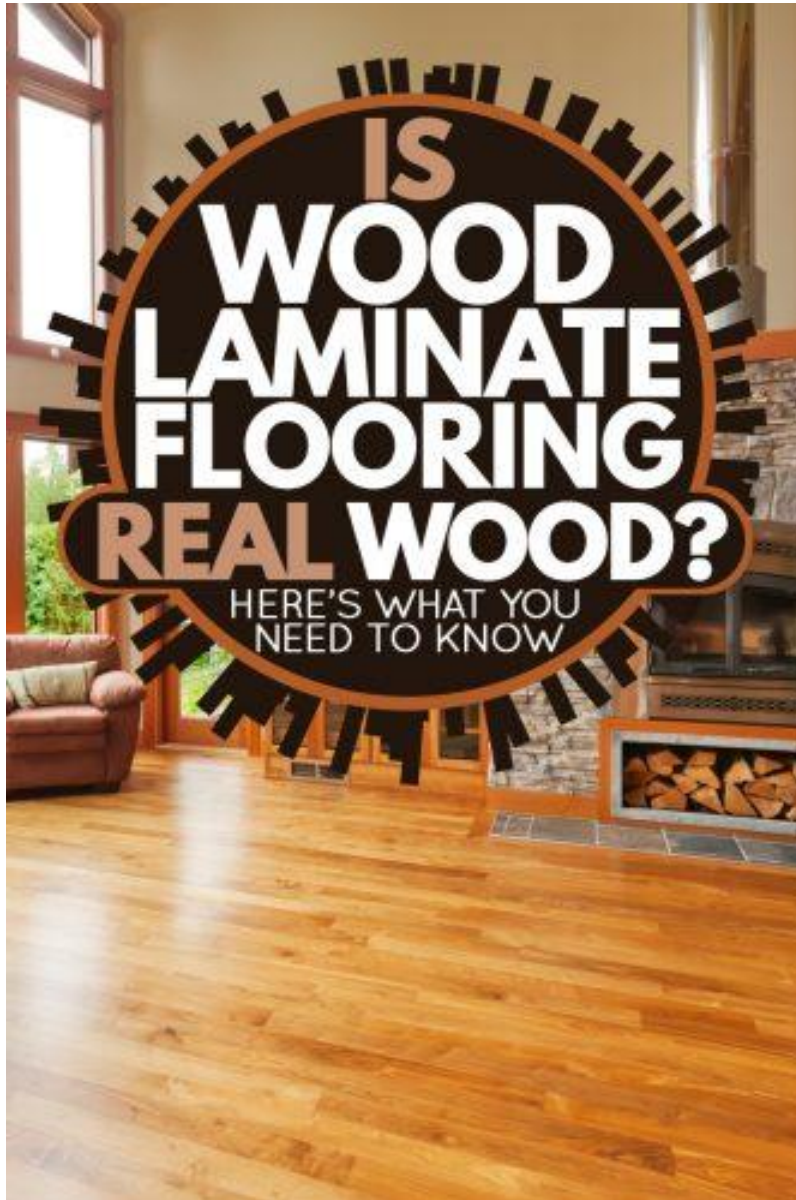
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It is not the traditional wood flooring, but laminates have an extensive range of pre-finished options. It is excellent for do-it-yourself installation and provides a durable and affordable upgrade when existing floors need replacing. We discuss this in more detail below.



## Laminate Flooring Design Options

When selecting your laminate flooring, you have a lot of possible looks to choose from. Most people think of the standard wood finishes, such as oak, hickory, or maple. But now there are laminates with stone or tile finishes.

Here is an excellent example of a stone-look laminate:

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You can also choose a classic wood look in a wide variety of woods and stain colors. There are various widths of planks available and some with the look of multiple boards on each plank. You can select designs with a monochromatic look or with variation in the tone. There are also different lengths of plank, and variations of the length of each board that appears on each plank.

As an example, here are a few designs we found on Amazon:



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[Click here to view the Turtle Bay Floors Ballard Grey Spalted on Amazon](#)

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The available variety you can choose from is quite large. The only way to get a real sense of what you will like is to go to your home improvement store or other retailer and see what is available. There are many major brands, such as Armstrong, Shaw, and Pergo. But there are also less well-known brands, and even store brands. Depending on which retailer you choose, different brands may be available, depending on what brands the store stocks.

## How Can I Tell If My Floors Are Real Wood?

Many modern laminate floors are so convincing that they make it difficult to tell whether it is a wood or a quality laminate. If you are having difficulty telling, there are a few things you can look for that will give you some clues.

### Repeating Pattern





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Some people have concerns about how realistic laminate with a stone or tile look appears, though. Your best bet would be to view these in person, if possible, before making your selection.

First of all, look for a repeating pattern. Most laminates will have a limited number of plank designs, meaning there will likely be a repeat in the grain on wood-grain laminates. Depending on how many different designs that particular laminate has, it may be more challenging to find. Keep looking; there will more than likely be a duplicate of at least one plank somewhere on the floor if it is laminate. On wood floors, every plank is different, with no repeats.

## **Exposed Nail Heads**

Look at the perimeter of the floor to see if there are any exposed nail heads. Often there will be on a wood floor. These are not always apparent, but if you find them, it is a good indicator that you have a real wood floor.

## **Dings And Scratches**

If there are dings and scratches that seem to go down into the wood, you may have real wood. While laminates will scratch and ding, the dent usually won't appear to be very deep. This isn't a certainty, but it can add to an overall set of clues that will lead you to conclude you have real wood.

## **Staining**

Look for stains. Laminate flooring doesn't stain the way real wood does. If there are stains or water blotches, it probably is natural wood.

## **Visible Knots**

If you are still having difficulty, look very carefully at any visible knots. If you see the same knot more than once in the room, it's probably laminate.

## **Check The Edges**

If all else fails, remove a baseboard or threshold if possible. Doing this may allow you to see the edge of one of the floorboards, which should make it easy to tell if you have real wood or laminate.

## **Can You Stain Laminate Flooring?**

There seems to be some disagreement on whether laminate flooring can be stained. Most manufacturers say no, and they do not suggest attempting any staining.

Some people say that as the surface of laminate flooring is not wood and is not porous, it will not absorb wood stains.

Others say they use a good gel stain after some light sanding, then coat it with polyurethane, and it works for them. One limitation is that it seems to only work to darken what you have or make slight changes to tone, but not to change the color you currently have altogether.

While this may work, it won't work as a stain usually does, but more like a transparent paint. The results may look good in the short term, but there are many questions raised on the durability of the final product. One question many ask is whether this will hold up to regular foot traffic.

While staining your laminate flooring may or may not work out for you, we find no substantial evidence to suggest that this works out well in the long term.

## **Can You Refinish A Laminate Floor?**

Laminate flooring is not designed to be sanded and refinished. The layer that looks like wood, tile, or stone is typically fragile, and you would likely sand right through it.

There are, however, other techniques for refinishing the laminate flooring.

One option is to use a good strip and shine product. This will help restore the shine and finish of your flooring, but it won't change anything about the overall look.

Here is one we found that works with laminate flooring:





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You can also try a wood and laminate renewal kit, like this one:



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You also have the option of painting your floor. A very light sanding, then a layer of paint of your choice, followed by a hard clear coat on top, will create a new look for your floor. It will no longer look like the wood your laminate looked like, though it covers it completely.

Some people have tried staining. See the question before this one for more details, but it doesn't seem to work well. On the other hand, if your floor is in bad shape and needs refinished or replaced, it may be worth trying before you remove it and replace it.

## Is Laminate Prone To Water Damage?

Laminate flooring is not especially prone to water damage under normal circumstances. If you clean a simple spill within a short time, there is no problem, but significant water on the floor for an extended period will damage the flooring.

Standing water is a problem. If you have laminate in an area that may become flooded — a basement, laundry room, bathroom, etc. — the water can seep into the seams and get to the particleboard core. When that happens, it can soak in and cause the laminate to warp or swell, creating permanent damage.

You can apply a sealer to the seams when installing, limiting some of the water damage. Some people have had good results by using these sealers on the seams of the flooring in a bathroom. The sealers or glue will not seal it to the point that it will hold up to extended flooding, however.

## Summary

While there is a particleboard core that contains wood on most laminate flooring, laminate is not what is typically considered wood flooring.

Other than the layer of particleboard, there are plastics, urethanes, and other materials that make up the laminate flooring. These layers are bonded together, and the particleboard is only a part of the overall product.

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