

# Maintaining Timber Floors in Melbourne's Climate: Tips and Common Mistakes

Melbourne's weather is famously changeable – from steamy humid summers to cooler, relatively dry winters <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>. These seasonal swings mean your timber floors will naturally expand and contract. In humid summer air, wood planks can swell; in dry winter air, they may shrink and even pull apart slightly <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>. That's why installers always leave a small 5–8mm expansion gap around the room perimeter <sup>5</sup>. In practice, you should keep indoor humidity around 40–60%. If indoor air falls below about 35% RH, floors will tend to shrink <sup>6</sup>. Running a humidifier in winter or using air-conditioning/dehumidifiers in summer can help stabilize the humidity and protect the wood <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>.

## Daily & Weekly Care Routines

- **Dust and Dirt Control:** Every day (or as often as needed), sweep with a soft-bristle broom or use a vacuum (without a beater bar) to remove grit and dust <sup>9</sup>. Tiny particles act like sandpaper underfoot, so trapping them early is key <sup>9</sup>.
- **Spot-Clean Spills Immediately:** The moment liquids spill, blot or wipe them up with a dry or barely-damp cloth <sup>9</sup>. Prompt cleanup prevents moisture seeping into the wood or finishes, avoiding stains and warping.
- **Damp Mopping (Weekly):** About once a week, use a microfiber mop or soft cloth that's only *slightly* damp <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup>. Never soak the floor. According to flooring guides, "Timber floors should **never** be soaked with water" – a damp wipe is enough <sup>11</sup>. Over-wetting can force moisture into joints and damage the finish <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>.

## Monthly & Periodic Maintenance

- **Deep Clean with Wood-Safe Products:** Every month or so, use a **pH-neutral wood floor cleaner** <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>. Look for products labeled for timber floors – harsh chemicals will strip finishes. As one guide notes, a wood-safe cleaner is essential because "harsh chemicals can strip the protective finish" <sup>14</sup>. A diluted, pH-neutral formula will lift grime without harming the wood <sup>14</sup>.
- **Rotate Rugs and Furniture:** Every few months, shuffle rugs and mats around. This evens out wear and fading <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>. Heavy furniture should be lifted (not dragged) when moved, and all legs should have felt pads to prevent dents <sup>16</sup>. Check pads periodically and replace any that have worn off.
- **Check and Recoat (Yearly):** Inspect your finish once or twice a year. If the surface looks dull or worn, consider a maintenance polish or recoat. For polyurethane-finished floors, a fresh finish coat can restore protection <sup>17</sup>. Hardwax-oiled floors may simply need re-oiling. (If you're unsure how, a flooring professional can advise.)

## Climate & Humidity Tips

Melbourne's *four-seasons-in-a-day* climate means indoor climate control matters. Keep a digital hygrometer in the home. In very dry winter months, use a humidifier to boost moisture; in humid summer, air-

conditioning or dehumidifiers help keep levels in check <sup>7</sup> . The goal is roughly 40–55% humidity – outside that, you may see floor gaps (when too low) or slight cupping (when too high) <sup>6</sup> <sup>4</sup> . Remember, timber is hygroscopic (it absorbs/releases moisture). A stable indoor environment minimizes expansion and contraction <sup>7</sup> .

Also, allow for expansion gaps around walls and at room thresholds <sup>5</sup> . Never install wall-to-wall trim that blocks these gaps (the gap will be covered by skirting or a cork joint in most homes). If you ever refinish or add floors, check with the manufacturer on recommended gap size – but 5–8 mm is typical to avoid buckling when the wood swells <sup>5</sup> .

## Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Steam or Excessive Water:** Never use a steam mop or flooding wet-mop. The heat and moisture from steam can peel or crack finishes <sup>11</sup> <sup>18</sup> . Likewise, a soaking wet mop can warp boards. Even well-meaning vinegar-and-water mixes are too acidic and will dull or etch the finish <sup>19</sup> .
- **Harsh Chemicals:** Skip bleach, ammonia, straight vinegar, or general household cleaners. These contain harsh agents that “can strip the protective finish” and even discolor the wood <sup>19</sup> . Only use cleaners made for timber floors (which are typically neutral-pH and non-abrasive <sup>14</sup> ).
- **Abrasive Tools:** Don’t scrub with steel wool, scouring pads, or brushes with stiff bristles <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> . Even a small screwdriver or scouring sponge can scratch the finish. Stick to soft microfibre cloths and gentle pads.
- **Neglecting Entry Mats:** It’s tempting, but skipping a door mat invites dirt and grit straight onto the floor. Use absorbent floor mats at all entry points <sup>22</sup> and consider a “no shoes” policy indoors. A generous doormat can catch sand or moisture before it ever hits the wood.
- **Not Addressing Climate:** Ignoring humidity changes is a mistake. If floors gap badly in winter or cup in summer, check your humidity control and expansion gaps as above <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> .

## Recommended Products and Tools

- **Cleaners:** Always choose a **timber-safe, pH-neutral** floor cleaner <sup>14</sup> . These products gently clean without damaging the finish. Avoid “all-purpose” cleaners – they often contain alkalis or acids unsuitable for wood.
- **Mops & Cloths:** Use a **microfiber mop or cloth** for both dusting and mopping <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> . Microfibre is highly absorbent yet gentle. A lightly damp mop will lift dirt without excess water. Never let a mop stay wet – wring it well.
- **Brooms & Vacuums:** A **soft-bristle broom** or vacuum (with the brushroll off) is ideal <sup>9</sup> . The vacuum’s wood-floor setting prevents scratches. Sweep or vacuum regularly to keep abrasive particles off the floor.
- **Protective Pads:** Equip all furniture legs with **felt or rubber pads** <sup>22</sup> <sup>16</sup> . These prevent scratches when chairs or tables move. Check pads yearly – if they’re dingy or missing, replace them.
- **Mats and Rugs:** Use **breathable mats/rugs** in high-traffic areas <sup>23</sup> . Placing area rugs or runners in hallways and under seating will prolong the finish. Just be sure mats aren’t rubber-backed (which can trap moisture and stain wood <sup>23</sup> ).
- **Humidity Helpers:** A **hygrometer** (humidity gauge) will help you monitor indoor moisture. If needed, use a **humidifier** in winter or a **dehumidifier/air conditioner** in summer. These tools keep humidity steady (ideally 40–60%) to protect your floor <sup>7</sup> .

## Maintenance Checklist

- **Daily:** Sweep or vacuum, and spot-clean spills immediately <sup>9</sup> . Keep the floor free of grit.
- **Weekly:** Microfiber-damp mop the floor <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> . Use a wood-safe cleaner as needed, but avoid soaking.
- **Monthly:** Give floors a deeper clean with a pH-neutral wood floor solution <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> . Move rugs and check felt pads. Trim pet nails and add rugs in high-traffic paths to prevent scratches <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> .
- **Seasonal/Yearly:** Inspect for wear. Recoat or polish if the finish looks worn <sup>17</sup> . If gaps or cupping become extreme, adjust your humidity and expansion gaps.
- **Ongoing:** Never use steam cleaners, vinegar, bleach, or aggressive scrubbing <sup>11</sup> <sup>21</sup> . Use entry mats and furniture pads <sup>22</sup> . Keep pets' nails trimmed – even a bit of overgrowth (many dogs grow 1" of nail a week!) can scratch the floor <sup>26</sup> .

Forma Flooring supplies beautiful timber floors that are built to last in Melbourne's climate, but we leave the cleaning to you. We don't offer maintenance services – instead, we want you to enjoy your floors for years using the tips above. If you have questions about flooring options or want to see wood samples in your home, **please get in touch**. We're happy to advise on the right timber for your needs or send out product samples so you can see how they look in your space.

Whether you're a homeowner, property manager or renovator, a little regular care will keep your timber floors looking stunning. Follow these climate-tailored tips, avoid the common pitfalls, and your floors will reward you with warmth and beauty for decades.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>22</sup> **Best Timber Flooring Solutions for Melbourne Businesses - CB Timber Floors**  
<https://cbtimberfloors.com.au/blog/timber-flooring-solutions-for-melbourne-businesses/>

<sup>2</sup> **Climate of Melbourne - Wikipedia**  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate\\_of\\_Melbourne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_of_Melbourne)

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> **Do Timber Floors Shrink In Winter? The Effects Of Heating**  
<https://www.brisbanesfinestfloors.com.au/news/do-timber-floors-shrink-in-winter>

<sup>5</sup> **What Are Timber Floor Expansion Joints? And Do I Need Them?**  
<https://www.brisbanesfinestfloors.com.au/latest-advice/what-are-timber-floor-expansion-joints-and-do-i-need-them/amp>

<sup>11</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>23</sup> **How to Clean and Maintain Timber Floors: A Complete Guide - Natural Wood Floors**  
<https://naturalwoodfloors.com.au/how-to-clean-and-maintain-timber-floors-a-complete-guide/>

<sup>12</sup> <sup>18</sup> **What Can and Can't You Use to Clean Hardwood Floors? | City Floor Supply**  
<https://blog.cityfloorsupply.com/what-can-and-cant-you-use-to-clean-hardwood-floors/>

<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> **How to Prevent Dog Scratches on Hardwood Floors - Empire Today Blog**  
<https://www.empiretoday.com/blog/prevent-dogs-from-scratching-hardwood-floors/>