

Repairing Hairline Cracks in Hardwood

Repairing With Steam

You can repair small dents or cracks on an unfinished surface using a clothes iron and a wet cloth. Soak a towel in water and wring it out - it should be wet but not dripping. Clamp the piece to your bench in a convenient location. Set the iron to the highest setting and let it heat up. When the iron is hot, place the damp cloth on the damaged area, a single layer thick and press the iron to the cloth. Let it steam for a second or two and remove the iron. The water will have soaked into the surface of the wood and as the iron converts it to steam, the crushed cells will expand. Often this will eliminate the need for wood filler. After the piece is steamed it will need to be sanded again because the steaming will have raised the grain in the area.

Sawdust as Filler

Combining sawdust and glue is one of the most common ways of filling an imperfection. Use coarse sandpaper (50 grit) or a fine-toothed rasp to make enough sawdust from the same type of wood you are repairing. Then add glue to the sawdust and mix until it is the consistency of putty. Press the wood filler into the void. A toothpick works well for narrow spaces. Let the filler dry for a couple of hours, sand lightly, and then apply your finish. Glue and sawdust filler works best when used for very small imperfections or if the finishing application will be a solid colour.

Alternatively, sawdust and a finishing product can be used to hide some imperfections. For very narrow crevices, or hairline cracks no wider than the thickness of a piece of paper, pour a small amount of the finish on a piece of 100 grit sandpaper and sand the piece. The sawdust and finish will mix as you sand and push the slurry into the space. If the space is larger, try mixing the finish with the sawdust, then fill the space. You may have to dilute the finish before mixing it with the sawdust. Since sawdust consists of broken wood fibres, it will absorb the finish more readily than the solid wood. The filled space will be darker and more noticeable. This method works best on softer darker coloured woods. OR add drops of super glue into the crack while sanding the area. The sanding dust, called "swarf," combines with the still-wet glue to fill the crack as you sand, making an instant patch quite close to the color of the wood.

Shellac sticks: Shellac sticks come in tons of colors, look good, and are easy to apply. Shellac is a natural, low-toxic product made from beetle excretions that you melt with a soldering iron and let drip into the surface imperfection. You then press it in with a putty knife or chisel and wait for it to harden. After the shellac is hard, you scrape it flush with a chisel or thin cabinet scraper and then sand it lightly with fine sandpaper.

Squeezing: Sometimes when the crack is on an angle you can eliminate hairline cracks by "squeezing the crack". Take a phillips screw driver and run it against the edge of the crack and pushing the wood towards the crack. Do it on both sides to side if you can push the sides of the crack together. Might try a thin superglue in the crack first.

Mayonnaise: Smooth mayonnaise over the crack to fill it, wipe off any extra, and let the crack sit for a few days. The oils and proteins in the mayonnaise will make the wood swell up at the point of contact, and while it likely won't close the crack entirely, it'll definitely shrink. When it's swelled shut a bit, you can then wipe off anything left behind and polish the wood to obscure the crack.