

KEEP THIS WITH YOUR KITCHEN PAPERWORK

Caring for your *cabinets*

Here is the honest headline: your cabinets are easy to look after. Dust them. Wipe up spills when they happen. That is most of it. The rest of this guide is for the other five percent of the time.

I. THE SHORT VERSION

Three habits, and you are done.

1

Dust with a soft cloth

A clean, dry, lint free cloth once a week keeps grit off the finish. On wood grain doors, wipe the same direction the grain runs.

2

Wipe spills right away

Water, coffee, juice, grease, cooking oil. Blot it, do not let it sit. Almost all finish damage on a cabinet starts as a spill somebody left.

3

Always dry the surface

After any damp cloth, go over the same spot with a dry one. Standing moisture is the one thing a cabinet finish cannot shrug off.

II. THE EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Dust, spills, glass, and the occasional *real mess*.

Weekly dusting

A soft, dry, lint free cloth. An old cotton t shirt works as well as anything, as long as it is clean and has no buttons or snaps that can scratch. Skip the pre moistened dusting sheets and the aerosol dusting sprays.

Spills, as they happen

Blot with a damp cloth, then dry the spot. Pay attention to the bottom edges of doors near the sink and the dishwasher, where drips collect and nobody looks.

Cooking grime and fingerprints

Use the mild soap solution below. Put it on the cloth, never spray it onto the cabinet, because spray runs down into joints and hinge pockets where you cannot dry it. Wipe, then dry.

Two places people forget

The tops of your wall cabinets collect airborne cooking grease, so wipe them every few weeks. And clean the inside of a cabinet the same gentle way you clean the outside.

THE ONLY CLEANER YOU NEED

About one teaspoon of mild dish soap in two cups of warm water.

Mix it fresh, put it on a soft cloth, wring the cloth out so it is damp and not wet, wipe, then dry with a second clean cloth. That handles nearly everything a kitchen can do to a cabinet. Never reach for the kitchen sponge or the dishcloth by the sink, because both are carrying old grease and detergent.

IF YOUR ORDER INCLUDED GLASS

Glass doors

Spray the cleaner onto the cloth, never onto the glass. This is the one rule every cabinet maker agrees on. Liquid sprayed at a glass door runs down to the edges and seeps in where the single pane meets the wood frame, into the wood, where you cannot reach it and cannot dry it. That damage works from behind and shows up months later.

Use an ammonia free glass cleaner, or just the mild soap and water above. Ammonia attacks the finish on the wood frame around the glass, and the frame is the part you cannot avoid wiping.

Your glass cabinets are finished inside to match the outside, so the inside of the glass is on show too. Clean it the same careful way, cloth first, and dry both faces.

III. KNOW YOUR FINISH

Painted or stained?

Nearly all of the care is the same either way. A few things are not, so it is worth knowing which you have.

PAINTED

A smooth, even color

Whites, grays and black are painted finishes. The surface is one solid color with no wood grain showing through it.

- ◆ Nothing abrasive, ever. A scratch in paint cannot be rubbed out the way a mark on stained wood sometimes can.
- ◆ Wipe in gentle straight passes rather than scrubbing one spot. Hard scrubbing can polish a low sheen surface into a shiny patch that will not blend back in.
- ◆ Darker and lower sheen colors show fingerprints and water spots more than light ones. A damp cloth and a dry cloth takes them off. That is the color doing its job, not a problem with the finish.
- ◆ Skip polish and wax entirely.

STAINED WOOD GRAIN

Color with the grain showing through

Stained finishes are real wood grain under a tinted, sealed topcoat. Tilt your head and you can see the grain lines running the length of the door.

- ◆ Always wipe along the grain, not across it. Wiping across drags any grit sideways over the surface.
- ◆ Grain, color and the odd mineral streak will vary door to door. That variation is the material, and it is what people pay for in real wood.
- ◆ Stained wood mellows and deepens over the years, most visibly where daylight lands on it.
- ◆ A small scratch on a stained door often takes a touch up marker beautifully.

Not sure which one you have?

Take a door into good light and look at it from an angle. If you can see wood grain running through the color, it is stained. If the color is smooth and even with no grain, it is painted. And if you would rather just be told, the dealer who sold you your cabinets has your order on file and can look it up in a minute.

IV. BEFORE YOU WORRY

This is normal, *not a defect*.

Your cabinets are made of real wood and real wood products, and real materials move and change. Here are the four things homeowners call about most, so you see them coming instead of worrying about them.

PAINTED DOORS

A fine line where two painted pieces meet

On a painted door, look at the seam where the frame pieces join at the corners. Over a season or two a hairline may show along that seam. The wood underneath moves a little with the weather and paint does not stretch with it. It does not weaken anything, it does not spread, and it is a characteristic of painted wood, not a failure.

SEASONAL

Doors and panels that shift with the seasons

In a dry winter, a thin lighter line can appear around the edge of a door's center panel. The panel shrank slightly inside its frame and exposed a sliver that was tucked away when the door was built. In a humid summer the opposite happens and a door may sit a touch tighter. Both usually reverse when the season turns.

WOOD GRAIN

Color that changes over time

Wood darkens and mellows with age and light. Two doors from the same order will never have identical grain, because no two boards are identical. Painted surfaces shift too, usually going slightly warmer where daylight hits them. This is wood behaving like wood.

ADDING LATER

Cabinets added later may not match exactly

If you add an island, a pantry or a laundry run a few years from now, the new pieces will be very close but probably not a perfect match to cabinets that have been living in your light for years. The same is true of a showroom sample. Expect close, not identical.

V. WHAT TO KEEP AWAY

Things that will damage the finish.

Not a legal list. These are the things that actually ruin cabinets, and most of them are sitting under somebody's sink right now.

⊗ Ammonia and bleach

Including most blue glass cleaners and bathroom sprays. They break down the topcoat. On a glass door, the glass cleaner has to be ammonia free too, because it always reaches the wood frame.

⊗ Scouring pads and steel wool

They will cut straight through a finish in one pass.

⊗ Silicone sprays

Silicone soaks in and makes any future touch up or repair impossible. This one is permanent.

⊗ Paper towels on smooth painted doors

Paper is more abrasive than it feels and leaves fine scuffing on a high sheen surface.

⊗ The kitchen sponge or dishcloth

They carry old grease, food residue and concentrated detergent. Use a clean cloth.

⊗ Anything abrasive

Powdered cleansers, soft scrub creams and melamine eraser pads all sand the surface.

⊗ Solvents

Nail polish remover, paint thinner, mineral spirits, turpentine, oven cleaner. Keep all of it off the cabinets.

⊗ Wax and furniture polish

Your finish does not need either. They build a film that traps dirt and goes hazy and streaky.

⊗ Damp dishtowels hung over a door

The single most common cause of permanent damage we see. The bottom of that door stays wet for hours.

⊗ Steam cleaners

Forced hot steam drives moisture straight into joints and edges.

If you ever want to try a product that is not plain soap and water, test it first on the inside of a door near the bottom hinge, where nobody will see it.

VI. HEAT, SUN AND MOISTURE

The air in your house matters *more than the cleaner.*

35–50%
RELATIVE HUMIDITY

60–80°F
INDOOR TEMPERATURE

Keep your home between 35% and 50% relative humidity and 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, year round. That is the same moisture range your cabinets were built in, and holding it is the single best thing you can do to keep doors, drawers and painted joints looking the way they did the day they were installed. A fifteen dollar digital hygrometer on the counter tells you where you stand. In a cold winter, a humidifier brings a dry house back up. In a humid summer, running the air conditioning is usually enough on its own, so do not shut the system off for a long trip. In a bathroom, run the exhaust fan during a shower and for twenty minutes afterward.

Heat

A self cleaning oven cycle puts out extreme heat, far more than normal cooking. Before you run one, empty the cabinets and drawers on either side of the oven. Keep coffee makers, kettles, toasters and air fryers out from directly under a wall cabinet, because the steam and heat rise straight into the underside. After the dishwasher finishes, give it about twenty minutes before you open the door, so the steam condenses inside instead of rolling up onto the cabinet fronts.

Sunlight

Strong direct sun will change any finish over time. Stained wood darkens, paint shifts slightly warmer, and the change happens only where the light lands. If one run of cabinets takes hard afternoon sun, a sheer shade or a UV film on that window keeps things even. It also helps to leave doors closed and not to leave a small appliance parked in the same sunny spot for years, because the surface underneath will age differently from everything around it.

Moisture

Wipe up water at the sink base and the dishwasher. Do not let a wet mop sit against the toe kick. If you use a cabinet mounted trash pull out or store cleaning supplies under the sink, check that nothing in there is leaking. Steady dampness inside a closed cabinet is slow, quiet damage.

VII. SMALL FIXES

Things you can sort out *in five minutes.*

Doors and drawers are built to be adjusted, and a cabinet needing a small adjustment after a season is normal rather than a fault. Use a hand screwdriver for all of it. Never a power driver, which strips and splits before you can react.

WHAT TO LOOK AT

A door that sits crooked or does not line up with its neighbor

Open the door and look at the hinges inside. Each hinge has a few adjustment screws on it, and they move the door in different directions: up and down, side to side, and closer to or further from the cabinet. Work one screw at a time in small turns, close the door, and look at the gap again. Compare it against the door next to it rather than eyeballing it alone. One thing worth checking first: if every door on the same cabinet leans the same way, the door is not the problem. The cabinet is sitting out of level or out of square, and that goes back to the dealer who sold you your cabinets.

WHAT TO LOOK AT

A drawer that will not close flush

Start inside the drawer, not with the hardware. Look for a utensil standing tall, a box shifted to the back, or something that has slipped behind the drawer and is stopping it. Then pull the drawer most of the way out and look at whether it is sitting evenly on both runners underneath, or riding high on one side. Reseat it and try again. If the front itself is tilted against the ones around it, the screws holding that front on can be loosened just enough to square it up and then snugged back down.

WHAT TO LOOK AT

Soft close that has stopped closing softly

First, watch what happens as it closes. Soft close needs a little momentum to catch, so a door eased shut very gently can slip past it. Give it a normal push and see whether it catches. If a drawer has stopped, check whether it is heavily loaded, since a lot of weight can overrun the mechanism. On doors, look at the hinge for a small lever or switch that sets the closing strength, and try moving it to a different setting and back. If it still slams after that, stop there and call your dealer. A worn damper is a part replacement, not an adjustment.

VIII. NICKS AND SCRATCHES

Touch ups, and what they can do.

Kitchens get used. A chair back catches a door, a drawer takes a knock while somebody is unloading groceries, and eventually something leaves a mark.

Color matched touch up is available through the dealer who sold you your cabinets. Tell them your door style and your finish, or just your order number, and they will match it. A marker handles a surface scratch and a filler handles a small gouge. Work in thin passes and let it dry between them rather than trying to fix it in one go.

Two honest limits. Never take sandpaper to a cabinet to even out a scratch, because you will take the finish off and turn a small mark into a large repair. And a touch up blends, it does not erase. Stained wood hides a touch up more forgivingly than paint does, and a low sheen surface that has been scrubbed shiny in one spot cannot be brought back with a marker. For anything bigger than a scratch, stop before you experiment on it and talk to your dealer first.

Anything you are not sure about, *start with your dealer.*

The dealer who sold you your cabinets has your order, your door style, your finish and your touch up options on file. They are the fastest answer for a question, a part, or a repair.

FIND A TALIWOOD DEALER NEAR YOU

Your cabinets are covered by TaliWood's limited warranty. Damage caused by improper cleaning is not covered, which is the practical reason this guide exists. Full terms at taliwood.com/warranty.

TALIWOOD CABINETS

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