

# Pennsylvania Hardwood Flooring Buying Whitepaper

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## Introduction

Hardwood flooring is one of the most attractive and long-lasting flooring choices for Pennsylvania homes. It can add warmth, character, and value, but it also requires thoughtful planning. The right hardwood floor depends on the room, subfloor, moisture conditions, lifestyle, budget, and long-term maintenance expectations.

This guide explains the major decisions homeowners should understand before choosing hardwood flooring.

## What Hardwood Flooring Is

Hardwood flooring generally falls into two main categories:

### Solid Hardwood

Solid hardwood is made from a single piece of wood. It is valued for its durability and ability to be refinished multiple times.

Solid hardwood is often best for:

- Living rooms
- Dining rooms
- Bedrooms
- Hallways
- Above-grade spaces with stable humidity

### Engineered Hardwood

Engineered hardwood has a real wood surface layer over a layered core. It is designed to provide greater stability in changing conditions.

Engineered hardwood may be a better fit for:

- Concrete subfloors
- Finished lower levels

- Homes with moisture variation
- Wider plank styles
- Areas where solid hardwood may move too much

## **Solid Hardwood vs Engineered Hardwood**

The best choice depends on the space.

Solid hardwood offers long-term refinishing potential and a traditional feel. Engineered hardwood offers more installation flexibility and improved dimensional stability.

Key comparison points include:

- **Refinishing potential:** Solid hardwood usually allows more refinishing cycles.
- **Moisture tolerance:** Engineered hardwood generally handles environmental changes better.
- **Installation options:** Engineered hardwood may be nailed, glued, or floated, depending on the product.
- **Cost:** Pricing varies by species, plank width, finish, and installation method.
- **Lifespan:** Both can last many years when selected and installed properly.

## **Room-by-Room Hardwood Flooring Considerations**

### **Living Rooms and Dining Rooms**

These spaces often work well with hardwood because they are visible, high-value areas of the home. Appearance, plank width, finish, and color are important because the flooring often anchors the entire interior design.

### **Kitchens**

Hardwood can work in kitchens, but it requires more care. Spills, cleaning, appliances, and heavy foot traffic create more risk than in dry rooms.

For kitchens, consider:

- Durable finishes
- Lower-sheen surfaces
- Quick spill cleanup
- Area rugs near sinks
- Careful transition planning

### **Basements**

Basements are more complicated because of moisture. Solid hardwood is usually not the first choice below grade. Engineered hardwood may be considered, but only after moisture testing and proper subfloor planning.

### **Bedrooms**

Bedrooms are often lower-traffic spaces, which allows more flexibility in wood species, finish, and color. Comfort, appearance, and long-term style are usually the main priorities.

### **Homes With Pets**

Pet-friendly hardwood flooring is about reducing visible wear. No hardwood floor is scratch-proof, but some choices make scratches and scuffs less noticeable.

Helpful options include:

- Durable finishes
- Matte or satin sheen
- Medium color tones
- Natural grain variation
- Area rugs in traffic paths

### **Family Homes**

Family homes need flooring that performs under daily use. Scratches, furniture movement, toys, shoes, spills, and pets can all affect appearance.

The most practical family-friendly hardwood choices usually balance durability with easy maintenance.

### **Hardwood Flooring Installation**

Installation quality has a major impact on long-term performance. Even high-quality flooring can fail if preparation is poor.

A proper installation plan may include:

- Measuring the space
- Removing old flooring
- Inspecting the subfloor
- Testing moisture
- Allowing flooring to acclimate
- Planning plank direction
- Managing transitions
- Installing trim or molding
- Final cleanup and inspection

### **Subfloor Preparation**

Subfloor condition matters. Uneven surfaces, moisture, squeaks, damaged wood, or concrete issues can affect the finished floor.

Before installation, a contractor may need to address:

- Leveling
- Moisture barriers

- Loose boards
- Old adhesive
- Damaged underlayment
- Transition height differences

Skipping preparation can lead to gaps, movement, noise, or uneven flooring.

### **Plank Width and Layout**

Plank width affects the overall look of a room.

Wider planks can create a more open, modern appearance. Narrower planks may fit older homes or more traditional interiors.

Layout direction also matters. Running planks along the longest wall can make a room feel larger. Aligning flooring through connected spaces can create a more continuous flow.

### **Hardwood Flooring Cost Factors**

Hardwood flooring cost depends on more than square footage.

Major cost factors include:

- Wood species
- Solid vs engineered construction
- Plank width
- Finish type
- Removal of old flooring
- Subfloor preparation
- Labor complexity
- Stairs, closets, angles, and transitions
- Refinishing or site finishing
- Trim and molding

A detailed estimate should separate materials, labor, preparation, and optional work.

### **Refinishing Hardwood Floors**

Refinishing can restore existing hardwood floors and may be less expensive than replacement. It is often a good option when the wood is structurally sound but the surface is worn.

Refinishing may address:

- Surface scratches
- Dull finish
- Fading

- Stain color changes
- Minor wear

Refinishing may not solve:

- Severe water damage
- Deep stains
- Loose boards
- Major cupping or warping
- Floors that have already been sanded too many times

The refinishing process usually includes sanding, staining, and applying a new protective finish.

### **Finish Options**

The finish protects the wood and affects appearance.

Common finish considerations include:

- Sheen level
- Scratch visibility
- Durability
- Maintenance requirements
- Drying or curing time
- Compatibility with pets and kids

Matte and satin finishes often hide wear better than glossy finishes.

### **Scratch-Resistant Hardwood Flooring**

No hardwood floor is completely scratch-resistant. The better question is how visible scratches will be.

Scratch visibility depends on:

- Finish strength
- Sheen level
- Wood color
- Grain pattern
- Surface texture
- Lighting
- Maintenance habits

Textured finishes such as wire-brushed or hand-scraped surfaces can help hide minor scratches.

### **Moisture and Hardwood Flooring**

Moisture is one of the biggest risks for hardwood flooring.

Potential moisture sources include:

- Basements
- Concrete subfloors
- Kitchens
- Entryways
- Humidity changes
- Plumbing leaks
- Poor ventilation

Before installation, moisture testing may be important. This is especially true for basements, concrete, and homes with known humidity issues.

### **Choosing a Hardwood Flooring Contractor**

The contractor matters as much as the material.

Ask about:

- Experience with solid and engineered hardwood
- Subfloor preparation
- Moisture testing
- Acclimation process
- Installation method
- Dust control for refinishing
- Timeline
- Cleanup
- Warranty
- Written estimates

A good contractor should explain tradeoffs clearly, not just quote a price.

### **Questions to Ask Before Starting**

Before committing to a hardwood flooring project, ask:

- Is solid hardwood or engineered hardwood better for this room?
- Does the subfloor need repair?
- Are there moisture concerns?
- What installation method is recommended?
- How long will the project take?
- What is included in the quote?
- Are transitions and trim included?

- Can the floor be refinished later?
- What maintenance is required?
- What finish is best for my household?

### **Common Mistakes to Avoid**

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Choosing flooring based only on color
- Ignoring subfloor condition
- Installing solid hardwood where moisture is a concern
- Skipping acclimation
- Comparing estimates without checking what is included
- Choosing glossy finishes in high-traffic homes
- Assuming all engineered hardwood is the same
- Ignoring pets, kids, and lifestyle factors
- Waiting too long to clean spills
- Choosing the lowest price without evaluating workmanship

### **Hardwood Flooring Maintenance**

Good maintenance extends the life of hardwood flooring.

Helpful habits include:

- Sweep or vacuum regularly
- Use felt pads under furniture
- Clean spills quickly
- Use rugs in high-traffic areas
- Avoid excessive water
- Keep pet nails trimmed
- Follow manufacturer cleaning recommendations
- Maintain stable indoor humidity when possible

### **Final Thoughts**

Hardwood flooring can be a smart long-term investment when it is chosen and installed properly. The best result comes from matching the floor to the room, the household, the subfloor, and the expected use.

Whether you are comparing solid hardwood, engineered hardwood, refinishing, installation cost, or room-specific options, the most important step is informed planning.

BestHardwoodPA.com was created to help Pennsylvania homeowners understand these choices before starting a flooring project.