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Wood Flooring Grades Definition

Grades of Wood Flooring

Understanding the Different Grades
of Hardwood

When it comes to wood flooring, the wood used is graded by the manufacturers according to its appearance. We have recently covered the topic of grades in wood flooring, but felt it deserved a further write-up. Generally speaking, the features taken into account when grading wood include (but are not limited to): the number and size of knots; the amount of sap present in the wood and its colour variations. As a rule of thumb, the smaller the knots, the lower the sap content and the more uniform the colour, the higher the grade of wood and (of course) the higher the price.

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When it comes to deciding which wood grade is best for your wooden flooring, there are six grades of wood to choose from. Each grade gives a slightly different look. The grades are called:

1. Premium or A
2. Prime or AB
3. Select & Better or ABC
4. Natural or ABCD
5. Rustic or CD
6. Character or DE

In order to help you make a choice of wood grading for your hardwood flooring here are some of the characteristic of each grade:

Comparing Wood Flooring Grades

GRADE	DESCRIPTION	KNOTS	SAPWOOD	COLOR VARIATION
Premium A	Highest grade with uniform appearance and clear, healthy single knots with a maximum diameter of 10mm, dead single knots >5mm. No open defects.	Very few, small and unobtrusive knots >5mm	Not allowed	Minimal, but still present
Prime AB	Clear, healthy and dead single knots with a diameter >15mm. No open defects, cracks not allowed. Occasionally a very little sapwood permitted 5% per board.	Few knots >15mm	Very low	Light variation
Select & Better ABC	Clear, healthy and dead repair knots with a diameter >30mm. No open defects and cracks. Sapwood 15% per board allowed.	Some knots >30mm	Some sap	Allowed
Natural ABCD	Healthy and dead knots (filled) with a diameter >50mm. No open defects and cracks. Sapwood 30% per board allowed.	Bigger knots >50mm	Higher sap	Allowed
Rustic CD	Knots (filled) with a diameter <50mm and more. Displays a traditional vintage look	More knots and fillers	Higher sap	Allowed
Character DE	Special characteristic appearance, the unique structure is more pronounced, Unlimited knots, sound-cracks, insects marks, rough saw marks, surface deformation	Unlimited	High sap	Most pronounced

Premium Grade



A - Premium Grade

Flawless Precision. Timeless Uniformity.

Premium Grade represents the highest visual quality in wood flooring. Also known as A Grade, this premium selection is cut from the center of the log, where the grain is tightest and the color most consistent. The result is a floor that exudes elegance, precision, and a refined natural finish.

Key Features:

- ***Exceptionally uniform appearance***
- ***Very few knots, if any – small, tight, and unobtrusive when present***
- ***Minimal sapwood content***
- ***Subtle and consistent color tone, with only slight natural variation***
- ***No open defects, end cracks***

A Premium Grade floor delivers a seamless, high-end aesthetic—perfect for luxury homes, modern interiors, and minimalist design concepts. Its understated elegance allows the natural beauty of oak to shine through with clarity, balance, and sophistication.

Prime Grade



AB - Prime Grade

Refined Elegance. Subtle Natural Character.

Prime Grade—often referred to as AB or High Grade—offers a clean, elegant look with just enough natural detail to preserve authenticity. This is one of the highest visual grades available, ideal for interiors that require a polished and uniform aesthetic.

Key Features:

- *Clear, healthy knots with limited dead single knots (filled, up to 15mm in diameter)*
- *No open defects or end cracks allowed*
- *Light, controlled color variation*
- *Occasional minimal sapwood, up to 5% per board*

While Prime Grade offers a more consistent visual tone, light color variation will still occur—a natural characteristic of real wood. This gentle diversity brings warmth and depth without compromising uniformity.

Prime Grade flooring is perfect for modern, luxury, and minimalist spaces, where subtlety and sophistication are key.

Select & Better Grade



ABC - Select & Better Grade

Balanced Beauty. Subtle Variation.

Select & Better Grade, often referred to as ABC Grade, offers a well-balanced look that blends the authenticity of real wood with a slightly cleaner, more consistent appearance than natural grades. This grade features a moderate number of knots, allowing for character while maintaining elegance. It's ideal for those who want natural variation without excessive visual texture.

Key Features:

- ***Healthy and filled knots up to 30mm in diameter***
- ***Some sapwood allowed, up to 15% per board***
- ***Color variation present, but more controlled than in natural grade***
- ***No open defects or structural cracks***

You may also find repaired dead knots, all filled for a smooth, finished surface. The result is a floor with charm and soft movement, perfect for contemporary, Scandinavian interiors.

Natural Grade



ABCD - Natural Grade

Natural Grade—also known as ABCD Grade represents a rich, untamed expression of natural oak. This grade embraces the full spectrum of wood's visual features, delivering a surface that feels authentic, textural, and full of life.

Key Features:

- ***Large, filled knots — includes both healthy and dead knots (>50mm in diameter)***
- ***Pronounced color variation — ranging from light sapwood to rich heartwood tones***
- ***Sapwood content up to 30% per board***
- ***No open defects or structural cracks***

Natural Grade is ideal for those seeking a visibly expressive floor that tells the story of the wood's natural growth. Perfect for casual contemporary interiors.

Rustic Grade



CD - Rustic Grade

Raw. Bold. Unapologetically natural.

Our Rustic Grade flooring showcases oak in its most expressive and authentic form. This grade allows a virtually limitless number and size of knots, with pronounced features that reveal the full story of the tree's growth.

Expect:

- ***Heartwood and sapwood contrast***
- ***Dramatic color variation***
- ***Visible filler, carefully selected to complement—not match—the tone of the wood (may vary by batch)***

This is the perfect choice for spaces that celebrate texture, movement, and untamed beauty. It's also a smart pick for budget-conscious projects—providing the authentic look of premium oak at a more accessible price point thanks to its generous natural grading.

If you're looking for maximum character with minimum compromise, Rustic delivers.

Character grade



DE – Character Grade

Embrace the beauty of imperfection with our Character Grade flooring—a bold, expressive choice that celebrates the raw personality of real wood.

This grade features a special characteristic appearance, where the natural structure and grain are richly pronounced. It allows for unlimited healthy knots, sound cracks, and extensive variation in color and texture, making each plank completely unique.

Expect and appreciate naturally occurring or intentionally preserved imperfections, such as:

- *Insect marks*
- *Rough saw marks*
- *Surface deformations*
- *Mineral streaks and grain swirl*

This grade is ideal for those who value authenticity, rustic charm, and a floor that tells a story—perfect for cozy homes, boutique spaces, or bold commercial interiors.

FAQ

What is wood grading in flooring?

Wood grading in flooring refers to how the wood used is classified by the manufacturers based on its appearance. This typically takes into account features like size of knots, the amount of sap present in the wood, and its color variations. The fewer the knots, the lower the sap content, and the more uniform the color, the higher the grade of wood.

What are the different wood grades used in flooring?

There are typically five or six wood grades used in flooring, each with different characteristics and aesthetic qualities. These grades are Premium A or AB Prime , ABC Select & Better or ABCD Natural, CD Rustic and Character or DE

What are the characteristics of Premium and Prime Grade wood flooring?

Premium is the highest clear grade. Prime Grade, also known as AB-high grade of wood flooring. It is cut from the center of the log, has a uniform appearance, contains very few knots, and has a low sap content. The color variation is minimal due to the natural quality of the wood, giving it a uniform look.

What is the difference between Select & Better Grade and Natural Grade wood flooring?

Select & Better Grade, often referred to as ABC grade, contains some knots (though less than Natural grade), some sap, and some color variation. ABCD Natural grade, spots larger knots than Select & Better, contains more sap, and has more color variation.

What is the Rustic Grade in wood flooring?

Rustic Grade, also known as CD grade is the lower grade for wood flooring. It displays a larger range of color variation, has more knots and fillers, and contains higher sap content, giving it a traditional vintage look.

What is the Character Grade in wood flooring?

Character Grade, often referred as DE grade is the special antique grade for wood flooring. It displays a larger range of color variation, has more knots and fillers, and contains higher sap content, giving it a special antique look.





ALLINWOOD

**1405 Timber dr Suite A
Elgin IL 60123**

+1 9-ALLINWOOD

info@allinwoodusa.com



allinwoodusa.com