

Choosing a Stain: Oil or Water Based?

All wood stains are designed to bring out the natural beauty, color and depth of wood. Use this guide to help you choose which stain is right for your project.



Varathane Classic Water Based Stain

is great for completing projects quickly. It's an ideal choice if you are new to staining or looking for a low-odor and low-VOC stain.

- Rich, even color in 1–2 coats
- Fast drying and low-odor
- Topcoat in 3 hours
- Soap & water cleanup



Varathane Premium Oil Based Stain

is a superior stain engineered for speed. Using a wood conditioner is not needed, and the color on the can label can be achieved in just one hour.

- Deep, rich color in 1 coat
- Ultra fast 1 hour dry time
- Topcoat in 1 hour
- Mineral spirits cleanup



Varathane Classic Oil Based Stain

is a traditional oil based stain that is great for larger surfaces and advanced woodworking. The slower dry time allows you to layer coats and customize the look with expert color control.

- Layer coats to achieve color
- 2 hour dry time allows for color layering
- Topcoat in 8–24 hours
- Mineral spirits cleanup



11 Hawthorn Pkwy., Vernon Hills, IL 60061
800-901-0411 rustoleum.com/varathane

Wood Finishing Products



PRODUCT AND COLOR GUIDE

Varathane
SINCE 1958



Premium Oil Based Wood Stain

- Delivers deep, rich color in 1 coat
- Ultra fast 1 hour dry time
- 75% more coverage than competition; 275 sq. ft./quart*
- Available in a variety of colors, including distressed and reclaimed wood finishes.



*Dried film coverage at 0.5 mils when measured against competition

Classic Oil Based Wood Conditioner

- Works under any oil based stain
- Promotes even stain penetration
- Seals soft wood for even color



Classic Oil Based Wood Stain

- Layer coats to achieve color
- 2 hour recoat time
- 150 sq. ft./quart
- Timeless color assortment



Classic Water Based Wood Stain – Pre-Tinted

- Delivers rich, even color in a fast-drying formula with easy soap & water cleanup.
- Apply with a clean, lint-free cloth. Do not apply using a bristle or foam brush.
- For best results, use Varathane Classic Water Based Wood Conditioner first.
- Available in 12 pre-tinted on-trend colors, grab & go



WHITE OAK



GOLDEN OAK



BARNWOOD



DARK WALNUT



ESPRESSO



EBONY



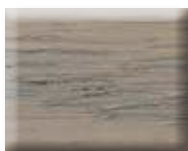
TRUE MAHOGANY



DARK BOURBON



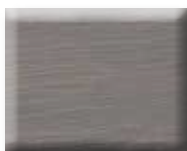
AMERICAN WALNUT



CLASSIC GRAY



SMOKE GRAY



GRAY STONE

Colors shown on this printed piece may vary slightly from actual product due to aging, lighting and printing process.

Classic Water Based Wood Stain – Tintable

- Delivers rich, even color in a fast-drying formula with easy soap & water cleanup.
- Apply with a synthetic bristle brush, foam brush, staining pad or lint-free cloth.
- For best results, use Varathane Classic Water Based Wood Conditioner first.
- Have product tinted at the paint counter, see pages 18-23 for Color Selector. (Use stain within 2 weeks after tinting.)



Classic Water Based Wood Conditioner

- Use as the first step in any water based stain project on all types of wood to prepare for staining.
- Promotes even stain penetration
- Helps enhance a rich, even color



Classic White Wash Wood Stain

- Create vintage, farmhouse finishes
- Can be used on bare wood or layered over stain colors
- Create distressed finishes by applying with a cloth, brush or sponge



Premium Gel Stain

- Ideal for vertical surfaces
- Thicker consistency to prevent drips
- No lap marks or grain raise



Wood Accelerators

- Create a unique aged, weathered or charred look in minutes
- Apply on all types of bare wood
- Easy soap & water cleanup
- Water based, low odor



Premium Polyurethane + Stain

- Durable polyurethane & premium stain color in 1 step
- Superior scratch resistance
- Available in Gloss & Satin sheens



Interior Oil Based Polyurethane

- Outstanding durability and scratch resistance
- Adds a warm, golden glow
- Self leveling, no brush strokes
- Available in Gloss, Semi-Gloss & Satin sheens



Triple Thick Polyurethane

- 3X thicker than traditional polyurethane
- Complete projects 3X faster
- Ultimate durability in one coat
- Fast dry time; dries in 2 hours
- Easy soap & water cleanup



Interior Water Based Polyurethane

- Crystal-clear finish
- Scratch and stain resistance
- Low odor
- Easy soap & water cleanup
- Available in Gloss, Semi-Gloss, Satin & Matte sheens



Floor Polyurethane

- Patented Aluminum Oxide Nano Technology provides maximum resistance to scuffs, scratches and stains
- Perfect for high traffic areas
- Fast drying
- Available in Gloss, Semi-Gloss & Satin sheens
- Available in oil based & water based formulas



Exterior Spar Urethane

- Ultimate UV and weather protection for outdoor wood projects
- Formulated to expand and contract with weather conditions, providing ultimate durability
- Available in Gloss, Semi-Gloss & Satin sheens
- Available in an oil base for a warm golden glow or water base for a crystal clear finish

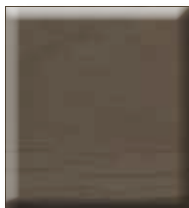


Super Glaze

- Pour on high gloss epoxy
- Ultra thick finish; one pour is as thick as 75 coats of varnish*
- Ideal for bars, tabletops, photo frames and more



*Compared to Varathane Crystal Clear Polyurethane



CLASSIC GRAY



AGED WOOD



TURQUOISE

Colors shown on this printed piece may vary slightly from actual product due to aging, lighting and printing process.



Classic Stain Markers

- Hide minor scratches and nicks in stained wood
- Touch up scratched tabletops and furniture
- Quick one-step method to apply stain and finish
- Available in 9 colors



Classic Fill Sticks

- Fills nail holes and minor imperfections
- Soft compound for quick, easy use
- No mess, fast-drying formula for quick repairs

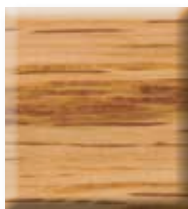


Premium Oil Based Wood Stain – Color Selector

Color selection varies by store.



NATURAL



GOLDEN PECAN



COLONIAL MAPLE



GOLDEN OAK



WESTERN OAK



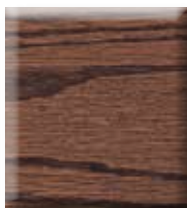
SUMMER OAK



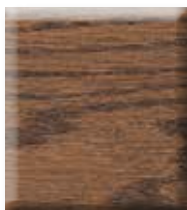
TRADITIONAL CHERRY



RED OAK



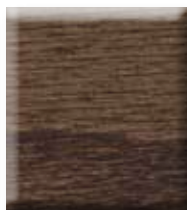
AMERICAN WALNUT



EARLY AMERICAN



ROANOKE



DARK WALNUT



BARN RED



COGNAC



CARRINGTON

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ANTIQUE WHITE



SUNBLEACHED



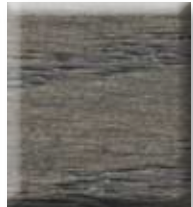
FOGSTONE



BRIARSMOKE



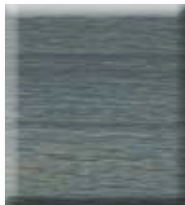
AGED BARREL



CARBON GRAY



VINTAGE AQUA



WORN NAVY



WEATHERED GRAY



BLACK CHERRY



KONA

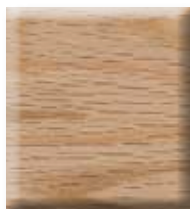


EBONY



*Scan this image with your phone to shop the wide range
of Varathane Premium Oil Based stains available
in-store and online at [homedepot.com](https://www.homedepot.com)*

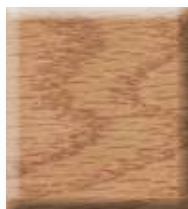
Classic Oil Based Wood Stain – Color Selector



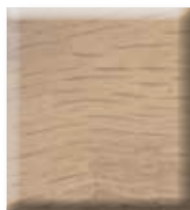
NATURAL



GOLDEN OAK



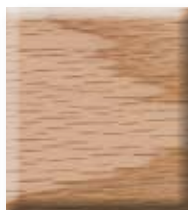
IPSWICH PINE



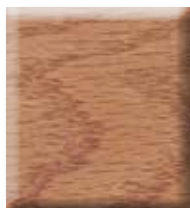
HAZELWOOD



CHERRY



GOLDEN PECAN



COLONIAL MAPLE



GUNSTOCK



HONEY



EARLY AMERICAN



AGED WALNUT



ENGLISH CHESTNUT



PROVINCIAL



RED OAK



SPECIAL WALNUT

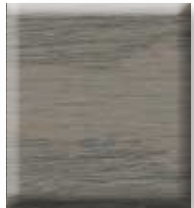
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CLASSIC GRAY



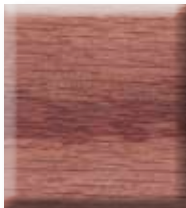
WEATHERED OAK



GRAY STONE



RED CHESTNUT



SEDONA RED



RED MAHOGANY



DARK WALNUT



SMOKE GRAY



JACOBEOAN



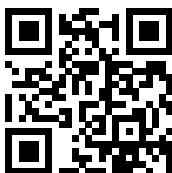
ESPRESSO



EBONY



CLASSIC BLACK



*Scan this image with your phone to shop the wide range
of Varathane Classic Oil Based stains available
in-store and online at [homedepot.com](https://www.homedepot.com)*

Classic Water Based Wood Stain – Color Selector

Product must be tinted at the paint counter.

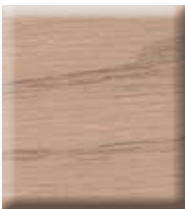
Clear Tint Base



WHITE



BEIGE



CANYON



DAISY YELLOW



NOBLE YELLOW



GINGER BEER



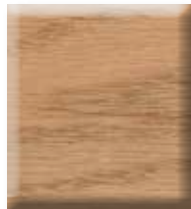
HONEY



CAFÉ



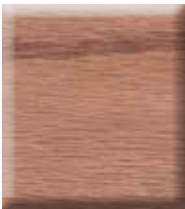
CHOCOLATE



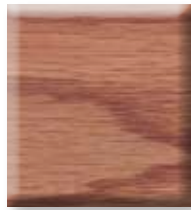
FAWN



BUTTERSCOTCH



SUGAR MAPLE



DESERT CLAY



BURGUNDY



SANDSTONE

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GOLDEN BROWN



TRUFFLE



AGED RED



NUTMEG



BLAZE



BRIGHT RED



SCARLET



CARROT CAKE



DAIQUIRI



BLUSH



SUNSET



VIXEN



PARIS PINK



DEEP AUBERGINE

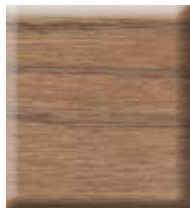


MERLOT

Classic Water Based Wood Stain – Color Selector

Product must be tinted at the paint counter.

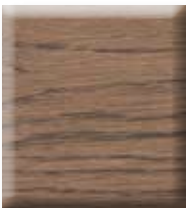
Clear Tint Base



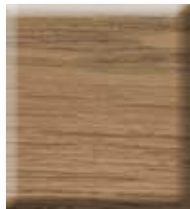
ENCHANTED FOREST



JAVA BEAN



AMERICAN WALNUT



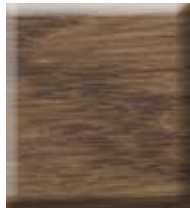
GOLDEN OAK



BRIARSMOKE



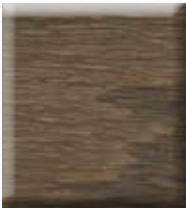
SPECIAL WALNUT



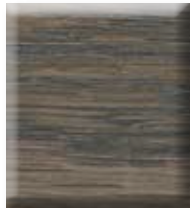
DARK WALNUT



KONA



ESPRESSO



CARBON GRAY



EBONY



ALPINE VALLEY



HARBOR MIST



MOSS



CALM SPRING

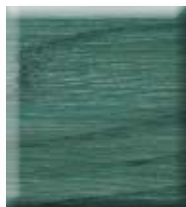
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EMERALD FROST



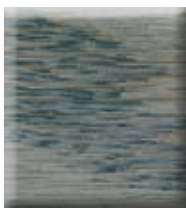
TEAL MOSS



FOREST GREEN



RIVERBED



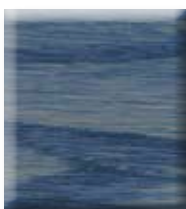
WORN NAVY



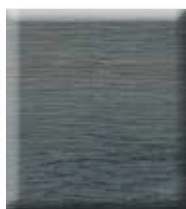
EMERALD



CARIBBEAN



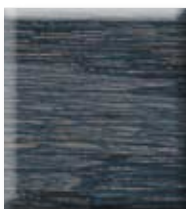
POOLSIDE



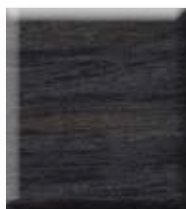
CHARCOAL GRAY



NAVY BLUE



NAVY



BLACK



MIDNIGHT

Classic Water Based Wood Stain – Color Selector

Product must be tinted at the paint counter.

White Tint Base



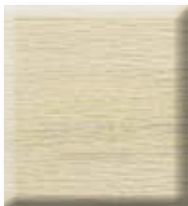
OVERCAST



APRICOT



WHEAT



MELON



DUSTY PINK



BIRCH





FRENCH GRAY



AQUARIUM BLUE



LONDON SKY



GRAY

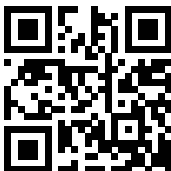


GREIGE



STONE AGE

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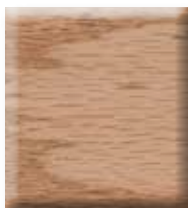


Scan this image with your phone to shop the wide range of Varathane Water Based stains available in-store and online at [homedepot.com](https://www.homedepot.com)

Premium Gel Stain Color Selector



GOLDEN OAK



CHERRYWOOD



HICKORY



MAHOGANY



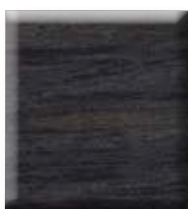
BRIARSMOKE



KONA



WEATHERED GRAY



BLACK



Premium Polyurethane + Stain Color Selector



ANTIQUE WHITE



CLASSIC OAK



PECAN



ANTIQUE WALNUT



BLACK CHERRY



MISSION OAK



ESPRESSO



MAHOGANY



JACOBEOAN



KONA



WEATHERED GRAY



BLACK

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How to Stain and Protect

with Varathane oil or water based stains and polyurethanes

1 PREP

- Sand wood in the direction of the grain with 120-grit sandpaper. Repeat the process with 150, 180, and finish with 220-grit sandpaper.
- For water based stain projects, apply Classic Wood Conditioner prior to finishing with the 220-grit sandpaper.
- Remove all sanding dust with a vacuum cleaner or tack cloth.



2 STAIN

- Liberally apply stain using a clean, lint-free cloth or high-quality bristle brush. *If using Pre-Tinted Classic Water Based Wood Stain, apply with clean, lint-free cloth, do not use a bristle or foam brush.*
- Allow stain to sit 3–5 minutes; wipe off excess stain in the direction of the grain. *If desired, additional coats can be applied. See label instructions.*
- Refer to the product label for the appropriate dry time before applying polyurethane.



3 PROTECT

- Apply a Varathane Polyurethane for long term protection.
 - For a crystal-clear finish, use water based
 - For a warm amber finish, use oil based
- Brush in direction of grain using thin, uniform coats; do not over-brush.
- Wait the appropriate dry time (see product label), sanding with 220-grit sandpaper in between coats as needed. (strongly recommended for water based polyurethane).
- For maximum durability, a minimum of 3 coats are recommended.



☐ Clean, lint-free cloths

☐ Protective gloves

☐ High-quality bristle brush
(Natural for Oil Based,
Synthetic for Water Based)

☐ Sandpaper - 120, 150,
180 & 220-grit

☐ Stir stick

Wood Project FAQs

Does wood type affect the final stain color?

Yes. The final stain color can vary by wood type. For example, Oak tends to be more red than Pine or Maple, which will change the final outcome. We recommend testing stain colors in an inconspicuous area first.

How do I prevent wood from blotching?

Soft, porous woods like Pine can be prone to blotching. Use a Varathane Wood Conditioner prior to staining as needed to prevent blotching.

Should I use an oil based stain or water based stain?

Either. Both will deliver rich, even color. Oil based stains can be easier to work with and create warm, rich color. Water based stains can raise the wood grain and require additional sanding, but are low odor and easy to cleanup with soap and water.

What topcoat should I use?

Oil based polyurethanes (interior) and spars (exterior) will add a warm amber hue. Water based polyurethanes and spars will be crystal-clear. If coating over a white base, use a water based polyurethane to prevent yellowing.

How do I update a finished piece without removing or stripping?

If you're planning to darken color or revive scratched furniture, use Varathane Premium Polyurethane + Stain. No stripping is required. Simply sand the existing finish, and apply our one-step Premium Polyurethane + Stain.

What product is suitable for vertical or non-wood surfaces?

Varathane Premium Gel Stain is a thick, non-drip formula which is perfect for vertical surfaces. It is also suitable for fiberglass, metal or plastic. A graining tool can be used with Gel Stain to add wood grain texture to non-wood surfaces.