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fast fillers for Flawless Coverups

Learn some simple solutions for getting better-looking projects with wood fillers.

I have one overall goal in mind when I'm building a project. And that's to make it look the best I can. That involves everything from materials to joinery and finish. But I also rely on a few "secret ingredients" to make sure the results are top-notch — wood fillers.

Filler & Putty. Throughout the building process, I'm sure to find small gaps, holes, or other blemishes that I want to camouflage. To do that, I use wood fillers and putties. There are three types — latex wood filler, wood putty, and epoxy filler (photo below). Each one has characteristics to meet different needs. Best of all, you can find them at most paint stores, hardware stores, or home centers.

LATEX WOOD FILLER

The problem solver I turn to most is wood filler. It's made from finely ground wood and a binder and has the consistency of toothpaste. You can find it in tubs or tubes. I prefer the tubes, because the filler is less likely to dry out in the container.

Gap Filler. What makes latex filler so versatile is that it's so easy

◀ **Problem Solvers.** *Latex wood filler, putty, and epoxy filler are all you need to fix minor problems.*

to use. All you need to do is apply a dab of filler over the gap. After working it in a bit, wipe away the excess. Wood filler hardens quickly so you can sand the filler flush with the surrounding wood.

I use wood filler most often to cover small gaps in joinery, as shown in the photo above. I also use it to conceal tiny gaps where molding meets a case.

There's one thing I'd like to note: On wood with open pores like red oak, latex filler can plug the pores and create a visible spot once a finish is applied. The solution is simple. Mask off the blemish with tape and apply filler in as small an area as possible.

Color Choices. You can find latex fillers in a variety of colors. Here, things can get a little confusing. The colors are named after different wood species like pine, birch, and cherry. So you'd think that to fix a gap in a pine project, you grab the tube of "pine" filler.



But that isn't necessarily the best choice. Instead, I try to have a range of colors and use the wood filler that matches best.

Color Matching. This brings up the question of how to choose the right color since wood is made up of a range of tones. I have a couple of guidelines to help me decide.

If the piece will get an oil or "natural" finish, I choose a filler that's a shade lighter than the primary color in the wood. The reason is the filler will absorb oil and darken more than the wood.

You can do the opposite if the project is going to be stained. In this case, the stain will not penetrate the filler as well as the wood. So I choose filler that's a shade darker to match the final color better. If you're unsure, it's best to try it out on a sample board.

WOOD PUTTY

Another handy cover-up in my cabinet is a few cans of wood putty. At first glance, wood putty looks a lot like filler. The key difference is that putty doesn't really dry out and harden.

After Finishing. That may not seem like much of a benefit. But putty is designed to be used after a finish is applied to a project. The photos above show one common use — covering nail holes after attaching molding. I wipe on a



▲ **Apply the Putty.** Press a small dab of putty over the nail hole. Work it in so the hole is completely filled.



▲ **Wipe Away Excess.** With a soft cloth remove the excess putty and buff away any residue from the surrounding surface.

small amount of putty over the hole. Then using a soft cloth, I wipe away the excess. The putty stays in the hole but it's easy to buff off the surrounding finish.

Since the putty is applied after finishing, it's important to match the color as closely as possible. Like filler, putty comes in a range of colors. You can usually find the color you need. But you can also mix two or more colors together to match your project (margin photo).

EPOXY FILLER

The third type of filler is a relative newcomer — epoxy filler. You can see what it looks like in the left photo below. Like standard epoxy, it has two parts — resin and hardener. But instead of being liquid, it's soft like modeling clay. When the two different-colored components are

kneaded together, the filler begins to harden similar to latex wood filler (middle photo below).

Super Hard. The main advantage of epoxy filler is it's much harder than wood filler. So it can be used in places that are subject to wear and tear, like the door edge shown in the lower right photo.

Once dry, the epoxy filler is rock hard and waterproof. It can be sanded, routed, or even drilled to accept screws. If there's a downside, it's that epoxy filler won't accept stain. So you need to match the color closely right off the bat. To get around this, you can add a small amount of artist's oil color while mixing the filler.

These problem-solving fillers and putties are inexpensive, too. But you'll get big time results and your projects will look better. 🛠️



▲ **Mix & Match.** Mix colors of putty to create a custom match to your finished project.



▲ **Cut A Slice.** With a knife, slice off a piece of epoxy filler. Wear gloves to protect your hands.



▲ **Knead Together.** Use your fingers to combine the two parts until the color is uniform.



▲ **Apply.** You have about five minutes to apply the filler. Once it's hard, sand or rout it to shape.