

Recycling Cedar for Flooring

Contributed by C. Mason Hearn
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We are buying a 1922 stick built home. In the back two bedrooms the walls are tongue and groove cedar planks. My question is if we can remove the planks and reuse them as flooring else where in the house??

Thank you
Catie

Catie,

I certainly encourage all forms of recycling. We should strive to make the most of our limited resources, and avoid waste wherever we can.

Generally, the most common forms of cedar, such as Eastern Red Cedar, may be used as flooring material. Its color variation and grain patterns make it an interesting finish choice.

You should consider a few things regarding such an undertaking:

- Cedar is a medium-density wood - 900 on the Janka Hardness scale (compare to 870 for Southern yellow pine, or 1360 for the most common flooring, white oak). This means that finishes will not hold-up as well as you would expect on oak or maple, and it may be fairly prone to dents and dings under impact (such as spike heel traffic). So certainly figure on covering high-traffic areas with floor coverings.
- Cedar has a tendency to split easily - so expect some collateral loss during removal, as well as some splitting during nail-down installation. If there are knots (usually plenty in cedar, depending on the grade), there may be some "fall out" there, also.
- Is the profile of the material suitable for your intended application? You will want the material to be at least 5/8" thick, preferably with a tongue-and-groove edge (although that is not essential), and have a flat surface.
- As with most adaptive reuse projects, expect that there will be a substantial amount of labor involved with extremely careful removal (to avoid cracking / breakage) and prep work, perhaps including some re-milling, to restore prior to installation as a floor. If this is a DIY project and you're willing to invest that time and craftsmanship, this may be worthwhile for you. If you're pursuing professionally and hoping to save money, I assure you that purchasing new flooring stock will prove more cost-effective.

Catie, since you are purchasing an older home, you must know that few wonderfully-unique things come easy. If you are willing to endure these hardships, I think you would find that a cedar floor would definitely add some "WOW" factor to your home. "WOW" is always worth the trouble, isn't it?

Best wishes in your new home!

Mason