

## Floored by Squeaks and Groans, Oh, My!

Contributed by C. Mason Hearn  
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Question for Mason : I don't know if it's the change in the temperature or what, but the former minor squeaks in my hardwood floor -- especially in the white pine in the kitchen -- are out of control. Is this something that your handyman folks can make go away?

I confess that I've tried fixing it myself. I read that you could rub graphite powder in the floor joints to fix. Can't tell you how %#@ @ed-off my wife is about this now that there's black fill in the light floor that won't come out, and the floor still squeaks. (any tips on getting ground in graphite out of a light wood floor, while I'm here?)

I'm pretty handy myself in other areas, but this ain't one of them, evidently.

G.T. Bryant

Mr. Bryant:

I feel your pain - for the squeaky floor as well as the likely more-significant ire of your partner for the botched repair attempt. Nothing quite like applying your time and best efforts, only to be hammered by watchful non-participants. Been there, done that, compadre.

We get some great ideas from word-of-mouth. Based on your experience, however; we'll not add the graphite fix to our bag of tricks.

The graphite thing is presumably intended to lubricate and eliminate wood-to-wood noises at the joints between two planks. Although sometimes the source of lesser, "groaning" noises, this is rarely where the really aggravating squeaky sounds come from (More information regarding how to differentiate a squeak from a groan may be found at certain adult pay sites on the internet). Those most-objectionable squeaks typically originate from the wood floor planks AND/OR the wood / plywood subfloor moving against the steel nail shanks that hold them in-place. Therefore, the repair is typically to stop that very slight movement at loose joints.

We should highlight that the worst, most pervasive squeaks often originate due to gaps between the subfloor (usually plywood in post-60's homes, board planking in earlier vintages) and the floor joists. If you can see a gap between the floor joist and subfloor, that's likely a location for a major honker.

The old-school repair (which sometimes is the easiest and most effective means) is to go beneath the squeaky area, and secure joist-to-subfloor or subfloor-to-hardwood plank, typically with a screw or screw/angle contraption. Sometimes glues or adhesive foam fillers might help. This avoids disturbance of the finished surface. Clearly, this option may not be feasible unless there is access to the underside, such as in a crawlspace.

Otherwise, there are some newer devices that tighten-up from the topside, with minimal surface disturbance. Squeeeeeeek No More is one of those. It is a snap-off screw system which leaves a small hole in the finish that wants to be filled with colored wood putty following the repair. I am unaware of the availability of these kits in local hardware stores. Typically, we purchase these online (that source where TRULY everything is quite available!).

Minimizing the time and quantity of "misses" is a big part of the project. Location is a bit of an educated guessing game, but a second hand is always a big help in locating the exact source of your squeaks.

A handy person with access to the right stuff is likely to be at least somewhat successful in effective, DIY repairs. If you're in our area, however, of course you may contact us and we would be more than willing to pull you out of the blame loop.

As for the graphite mess, UGH! Of course you will want something that dissolves this greasy carbon, but does no damage to your hardwood or finish. Searching online "Hints from Heloise", I see some reference to the use of dishwashing soap suds. A wet vac would be a big help with both removing the dry powder before scrubbing, as well as extracting whatever moisture may remain after soap suds are applied. Naturally, leaving water in your floor joints might cause a problem of a new sort.

Best of luck, and do give us a call if you are ready for professional help!

Mason