Oil/Varnish Blend (a.k.a. "Danish Oil") is easy to apply, easy to repair and produces a long term durably finish with a "hand rubbed" oil finish look...

Oil/Varnish Blend

An oil/varnish blend is simply a mixture of varnish, a "drying oil" (see Oil Finishes), and thinner. These finishes are marketed under a number of different product names, many of which are quite misleading (See What Is a woodworker to do). Oil/Varnish blends consist of more or less equal parts Varnish, Oil, and Thinner. The most frequently used varnish (though not the most desirable) in commercially made oil/varnish blends is polyurethane. The oil is usually Boiled Linseed Oil (BLO), and the thinner is mineral spirits. However, oil/varnish blends can be made from any type of varnish using either of the drying oils, linseed or tung.

Oil/varnish blends produce a dull to satin sheen. They offer little protection against liquid water, water-vapor, heat, abrasion, household chemicals, and solvents. Over time the finish tends to dull so oil/varnish blend finishes must be renewed from time to time (though nowhere near as frequently as oil alone) to retain the original "look & feel" of the finish.

Oil/varnish blends are ideal in applications that are not subject to excessive hazards and where a "warm", "soft", "in-the-wood" finish is desired. Bedroom furniture, side tables, occasional chairs, and decorative works, are examples of appropriate applications.

Given the ease with which these finishes can be made in the shop we encourage woodworkers to make their own oil/varnish blends from components usually on hand. The savings over commercially prepared "Danish Oil" will be substantial. There is also no discernible benefit in using tung oil, either alone or in combination with BLO in these finishes. Again, see Oil Finishes for an explanation of drying oils, and to demystify the myths that have grown up around tung oil.

Some "Danish Oil" products also contain a stain (Watco). These finishes are just as easily replicated in your shop by replacing part of the mineral spirits with stain (the stain you select should be made with a varnish binder). We recommend a pigment only "wiping

stain" in this application as opposed to a so-called "Penetrating Stain" that contains both pigment and oil-soluble dye, but either will work in this application.

Applying an Oil/Varnish blend

It is difficult to imagine a finish that would be easier to apply than an oil/varnish blend. Simply prepare your project for finish, making sure to remove all sanding marks and remove dust from the surface (don't use a tack cloth). Then, with brush or pad, flood the surface[1] with oil/varnish blend.

Allow the finish to soak into the wood for ten to fifteen minutes, wipe off the excess, and then buff the surface "dry" with a clean lint free rag or paper shop towel. Set the piece aside and allow the oil to cure for 12 to 24-hours and then repeat. Generally, two applications will be sufficient, but a third application is acceptable to even the sheen or coarser textured, open grain woods. Do not apply more than three coats. If you want more sheen you should use a *wipe-on varnish*.

Over time the oil will crystallize giving the finish a dull, sometimes "splotchy" look. When that happens just clean the piece with mineral spirits and wipe on another coat of your oil/varnish blend. You'll be good to go for several more years.

Caution!

Oil-soaked rags are a fire hazard and can burst into flame from spontaneous combustion. Dispose of all rags properly. Either soak them in water until you can put them in the trash or spread them too "dry". Do not crumple or wad them up and toss them into your trashed receptacle.

[1]If the oil/varnish blend finish is being applied to red oak do not flood the surface with the first coat. Instead wipe on a wet coat, wait 3 to 5 minutes, wipe off the excess and buff dry. Then, revisit the finish at thirty-minute intervals and wipe the surface again until there is no evidence of finish bleeding back to the surface. The second coat can be applied more aggressively but you should still revisit the finish at thirty-minute intervals until all evidence of finish bleeding from the pores has ended. Finish bleed back is evidenced by small droplets of finish appearing on the surface.