

Care and Cleaning of Butcher Blocks and Wooden Cutting Boards



A wood butcher block can be a prized possession. It can take much hard wear and tear, be resurfaced or repaired, and continue looking good for many years. If you have recently purchased or acquired a new butcher block, be sure to season it to prevent staining and absorption of food odors.

Seasoning. A mineral oil finish is preferable to polyurethane or varnish for seasoning a wooden butcher block because the oil finish is easy to maintain and to repair if the wood surface is damaged. An oil finish helps to prevent the wood from cracking or pulling apart at the seams. Mineral oil is preferred for seasoning wooden butcher blocks. Boiled linseed oil will also work but it may turn rancid.

Before applying oil to butcher block, warm the oil slightly. Apply oil with a soft cloth, in the direction of the grain, allowing the oil to soak in between each of the four or five coats required for the initial seasoning. After each treatment, wait about four to six hours and wipe off oil that did not soak into the wood. Re-oil the butcher block monthly, or as often as needed.

Wood butcher block counters have all the characteristics of solid wood. They will shrink or expand as the moisture content of the wood changes. Extreme dryness may cause cracks. Any cracks that appear should be filled with wood filler, sanded smooth, and the entire block given a good coat of oil.

Using. Avoid cutting raw meat or poultry directly on a butcher block or wooden cutting board. Instead, place a plastic cutting board on the wooden surface and use the plastic board as the cutting surface. This will protect the wood and prevent it from becoming contaminated.

Cooked meats, fruits and vegetables can be cut on a wooden surface, but remember that the action of the knife will score the wood, making the surface hard to clean. To best protect the wood surface, use an inexpensive plastic cutting board instead – replacing the plastic cutting board as it becomes marked. Wood surfaces that have become deeply scored from knife marks should be sanded and refinished.

Cleaning. Oil finished butcher block tops may be cleaned as any other table top. A damp cloth with a detergent may be used; followed by a damp cloth to remove the detergent. Excessive water should be avoided. All water should be wiped up immediately. Wooden blocks or boards can be sanitized after cleaning. Dip in a dilute bleach solution (1 teaspoon of bleach per quart of water) or spray the surface. Allow to air dry. Do not use higher concentrations of bleach as this will dry the wood surface, causing cracks to form and creating places for bacteria to hide. Repeated use and cleaning will remove the oil finish. You should plan to re-oil the surface as often as needed.