My Christmas gift was a new coffee table. The old one had seen better days and it was time to replace it. However, as the new one comes through the door, I want to take good care of it.

Wood furniture is a major investment for most of us. There is nothing that compares with the look of a new table or bookshelf when you move it into your home. But keeping it looking good is the challenge.

In Alaska’s cold winter, furniture takes a beating. Wood furniture has a surprising amount of moisture. Even if stained or painted, it still absorbs moisture from the air. When the humidity is low, the wood dries out. If the humidity varies a great deal in your house, wood furniture will warp. With the recent 30 to 40 below weather, the air both inside and outside your house is dry. Make every effort to keep the humidity consistent.

Another problem is extremes in temperature. Table legs, seat backs and cabinet doors will warp and split when moved from inside to outside. Though we don’t do much moving during the winter here, think about it as you move extra furniture from the house to any unheated storage space.

Just as the sun can whiten fabrics, it can also bleach your furniture. Keep furniture out of continuous light.

But for most, the day-to-day wear and tear is what damages our furniture. Everyday life can be hard on wood furniture. Moisture from sweating beverage glasses leaves round rings and scratches mar the finish. If you have damaged wood furniture, all is not lost. Here are five common wood blemishes and how to remove them:

- White water marks or rings — This means you didn’t use a coaster and the moisture from the outside of the glass has entered the finish. See if you can dry it out. Cover the stain with a thick white blotter or thin towel and press with a warm iron. If it remains, rub in a little salad oil or mayonnaise. If it is still there, rub
with a little white toothpaste. The toothpaste has a gently abrasive quality that will smooth out the white mark.

- **Scratches** — Shallow scratches can be fixed by rubbing in one of the following: the meaty part of a walnut for light finishes; iodine for a cherry finish; or shoe polish for darker woods. Or, if the scratch is deep, use a kid’s crayon matched to the wood. Fill in the scratch and polish it out.

- **Heat marks** — Put a little turpentine or mineral spirits on a cloth and polish.

- **Stuck paper** — Soak with vegetable oil for about 30 minutes. Rub with the grain and polish. The harder paper is when your child has put a sticker on the dresser. Remove as much as possible, cover with petroleum jelly and let it set. Take the excess off with a credit card and polish to a gloss.

- **Gum** — Hold ice cube against gum until it hardens. Use an old credit card and pop it off the finish. Polish.

For everyday care of that new furniture, remember to dust frequently, so grime won’t accumulate. Occasionally, wood furniture will require heavier cleaning. To remove greasy soil, mix a solution of oil soap and water. Gently clean the furniture to loosen soil. Rinse with clear water, and then dry the piece with fresh cleaning cloths.

Dusting with a dry cloth can scratch, so lightly spritz your cleaning cloth with water, a spray dusting agent or wood polish. Never spray furniture directly, as it can leave a film that is hard to remove. Always follow the grain of the wood as you dust to avoid cross-grain scratches.

If your furniture is looking just a little dull, mix 2 tablespoons of vinegar with 2 cups of room temperature water. Rinse the surfaces and dry. Your furniture will sparkle.

Wood furniture is a major investment; take good care of it to protect this asset.

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