

Sanding end grain

Problems With End Grain

End grain is one of those things that can really bite you in the butt if you don't prep your projects properly. Many times, you finish sanding and everything looks and feels great, but then you apply the finish and all of a sudden your project looks like it was made from two different woods! The end grain soaked up so much finish/stain that it now appears to be a much darker color. Since the end grain is on a different face, where shadows can sometimes play tricks on the eye, you can usually get away with this color discrepancy and few people will ever notice. But there are some areas where this end grain issue is much more obvious, like the top of a rail and stile door frame, and you absolutely must take precautions.

The Prep:

First and foremost, it's all about sanding. End grain will always soak up more finish than face grain, and the result will be a darker color. But if you sand it to a higher grit, it tends to burnish the surface and limits the absorption of finish. The result is a lighter color that more closely matches the face grain. So if you plan on sanding the project to 180 grit, I would sand the end grain to about 320. That will greatly improve your results.

But here's the catch: end grain does not sand as easily or as quickly as face grain. So you might be wondering, "How do I know when I have sanded enough?"

Alternative Sanding:

Now in some woods, sanding to a higher grit just doesn't do the trick. Or maybe you are just a little lazy and you don't want to do the extra sanding. Well there is still hope. Simply pre-seal the end grain. A light coat of a 2lb cut of shellac will work great for this. You can also use a solution of glue size. Glue size is basically a solution of PVA glue and water (dilute the glue by about 90%). Regardless of which solution you use, give the end grain a good sanding after the sealer dries and you'll be ready for your finish.