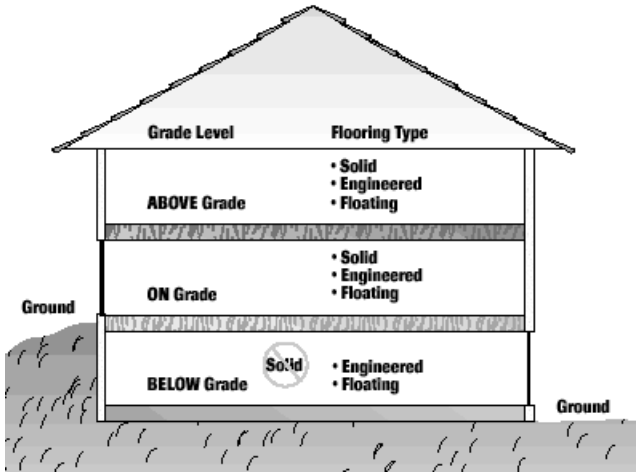
Hardwood Installation On, Above, and Below Grade Explained

Hardwood flooring, solid and engineered, has three installation grades: above grade, on grade, and below grade. Installation grades tell you on what level your hardwood floors should be installed. Due to indoor humidity, the level at what you install your flooring is crucial to having your floors stay in good condition. You should always follow the manufacturer's recommendations on which grade you should install your flooring. Installing below the recommended grade level can result in too much humidity and moisture getting into your hardwood floor causing it to warp and even crack.

Below Grade

Below grade refers to a house's level that is below the earth's surface, such as a basement or the lower level of a split-level house. It does not matter if the depth is only centimeters below the ground, it is still considered below grade. The soil beneath the ground is constantly absorbing water, this is no exception for the soil around your home. Solid Hardwood is a porous floor material, meaning it absorbs moisture easily. So if solid hardwood flooring is installed underground, it has a higher potential to absorb the surrounding moisture in your below-grade level and ruin your floors. Most manufacturers will recommend you to not install solid hardwood flooring below grade.



But if you're dead-set on hardwood flooring in your basement or lowest, below-ground level, engineered hardwood flooring is a good alternative. Most engineered hardwood can withstand the excess moisture that can occur in below grade environments. Engineered Hardwood is not waterproof, so flooding can still cause severe damage. Always check the manufacturer's recommendations before installing hardwood floor below grade.

On Grade

On grade refers to the ground level of a house. While the ground level is less likely to damage hardwood floors from excess moisture, there is still a possibility if you live in an area with extreme heat and moisture conditions. Solid hardwood floors tend to expand and contract in extreme conditions, so possibly talk with a specialist in your area to make sure your hardwood floors can stand up to your area's weather and moisture conditions. Sometimes de-humidifiers, humidifiers, or simply running the air conditioning and heating during certain seasons can help protect your floor.

Again, engineered hardwoods can hold up better to on grade levels where year round weather conditions may not be favorable for solid hardwood flooring. Floating floors are also a good choice for on grade and potentially below grade installations. Floating floors can refer to either laminate or engineered hardwoods that use a click-and-lock system and sits on top of an underlayment. The underlayment acts as a barrier between the subfloor and the flooring, allowing air and moisture to be blocked or dispersed with either little or no damage to your floor. Be sure to use the proper underlayment for your subfloor and flooring types and contact the manufacturer with any questions.

Above Grade

Above grade refers to any level of the house that is at least 18 inches above the ground, or surface of the earth. These levels are not prone to absorbing ground moisture, so they are ideal for most types of flooring. However, with any hardwood flooring, proper indoor humidity should always be attained, between 35-50%, to maintain proper floor care and reduce the risk of damage.

At Bestlamiante, we will do our best to help you with any questions you have about your hardwood flooring. Please do not hesitate to contact us or the manufacturer of your flooring with questions.