Never Struggle with Squeeze-Out Again

Wonder product prevents glue from sticking but doesn't affect finishes

BY MICHAEL C. FORTUNE

WAXILIT IS TRIED AND TRUE, BUT OTHER WAXES WORK TOO

I discovered Waxilit in a catalog of German machinery a few decades ago and have been using it since to guard against glue squeeze-out. In that time, it has never let me down. But as I was writing this article, I discovered that my longtime source was no longer going to sell it. Fortunately, I eventually found a second source, Johnson's Workbench, that sells shoe-polish-sized cans. That's more than enough Waxilit to last for several years. As I was scrambling to find a new source, I also began to test other paste waxes extensively. I discovered (not surprisingly) that any wax would prevent glue from sticking. However, not every wax plays friendly with finishes. Some waxes have silicone in them, which causes problems. But waxes that are silicone-free work great, even with waterborne finishes. So, if you don't want to order Waxilit over the phone, look for a silicone-free paste wax.

WAXILIT 22-30 P
$10, Johnson's Workbench
By phone only: 800-292-5937

Apply wax to assembled joints

The wax goes on the joint before you spread any glue. Put it wherever glue will squeeze out, and wherever it's likely to drip.

Dry-fit first. *Then clamp the joint together as tight as it will be after glue-up. A tight joint ensures that you'll get wax where you want it (around the joint) but not where you don't (on glue surfaces).*

How to get an even coat. *Pick up a small amount on a tissue (above), and then smear it in (right).*

Tissue is the right tool. *Thicker materials don't reach into the tight corner where parts meet. Apply a thin coat, which should dry clear. If there's a white residue, you've applied too much.*

When I glue up a joint, I want to see a small, consistently sized bead of glue squeeze-out along the joint line. It's a good indication that the joint isn't starved for glue. It's also a pain in the neck. If you remove squeeze-out while the glue is wet, you run the risk of leaving behind residue that you invariably discover only after applying a finish. But try to remove the hard glue with a chisel or scraper and you can damage the wood.

I reached my limit of frustration 20 years ago while making 14 chairs that each had over 60 joints. I spent a full week removing the squeeze-out from the first chair I glued up. So, before I glued up the next one, I desperately searched for a solution.

I found a great one: Waxilit. I'm surprised more people don't know about it. It was originally designed to minimize friction on the surfaces of production woodworking machinery, but I also discovered that glue does not stick to wood that has been coated with it. After the glue has dried for about an hour, it pops off cleanly from the coated surface! Just as importantly, Waxilit doesn't affect finish. It's easy to wash it off with denatured alcohol, and I've put a lot of finishes over it—everything from penetrating oils to sprayed lacquers—without any problems. I've done some

TIP

USE A BRUSH ON POROUS WOODS

Tissue would push the wax deeply into the pores. Brush it on gently instead.

Photos: staff

Let the squeeze-out stand

This is a great change of pace for glue-ups. Typically, your stress levels are peaking at this point, because you're not sure if you should wipe away the glue with a wet rag or chisel it off later. Now, you can just relax.

Glue freely. *Since it won't stick to the wax, you can put glue in places where it's sure to cause squeeze-out, like the face grain around a mortise.*

Don't wipe. *You want a small, tight bead that is easy to lift off after the glue has partly dried. Leave it to firm up. By then you should be able to remove the clamps for easier access.*

testing with waterborne finishes (which I don't use) and they seem to work fine with the waxes, too. It really is a cure-all for squeeze-out. And the time you spend applying and removing Waxilit is nothing compared to the hassle of removing squeeze-out and then repairing the damage you caused.

I apply Waxilit around joints before I spread any glue, and it's an important part of my inlay technique, too. It's easy to apply and simple to remove. I'll show you how.

A little does a lot

After you've bought your first can of Waxilit, there is one thing you need to do before you use it: Let it sit with the top off until it becomes about as firm as a stick of Crisco. Otherwise, it's too soft and can bleed into the wood, making it difficult to clean up.

I sand all of my parts up to P220-grit before applying the wax. Also, I dry-fit the joints and clamp them. With the joint tightly together, you can spread the wax with no fear that it will get on any of the glue surfaces. I use a facial tissue or toilet paper to apply the wax, smearing it into the tissue with my finger so that it goes on in a smooth, even coat. Wipe it wherever squeeze-out and drips are likely to occur.

From there, glue up the joint, clamp it, and let it stand. Don't touch the squeeze-out for an hour. At that point, you should be able to get a chisel or fingernail under the bead of glue and peel or pop it off. It's like magic. Whenever I demonstrate this to students, they're amazed at how easily the glue comes off—often in a single, continuous piece that runs around the joint!

Finally, before you apply your finish, do a bit of cleanup. Use denatured alcohol and a toothbrush to scrub the wax from the surface, using a tissue to soak up the alcohol—and the dissolved wax—before it evaporates. You might wonder why that step is necessary if Waxilit doesn't affect finishes. Honestly, I do it to be safe and recommend that you do the same.

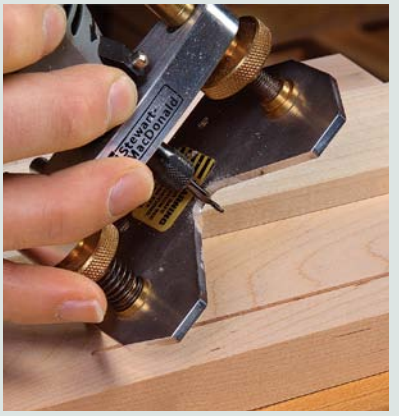
You might also ask whether you need to use Waxilit or if any paste wax will do. The short answer is no, you don't have to use Waxilit, but you need to be careful when picking another one. Waxilit is silicone-free and that's why it doesn't affect finishes. So, if you use another wax, make certain that it's silicone-free, too. □

Michael C. Fortune is a contributing editor.

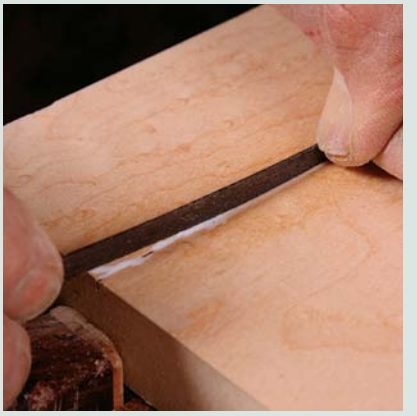
TIP

GREAT FOR INLAY, TOO!

The technique for inlaying into solid wood and veneered surfaces begins the same (right), but the cleanup for the two surfaces is different. In solid wood, trim the inlay flush before cleaning. Reverse that order for inlay set into veneer, where sanding the inlay flush might push the wax too far into the pores.



Spread the wax before routing the grooves. *If you cut the recess first, you're sure to get wax into it and the glue won't bind to the floor and walls of the slot.*



Then glue in the inlay. *Use plenty of glue to create a strong bond, and let any squeeze-out dry in a bead, just as you would with a joint.*

Cleanup is a breeze

This is where the magic happens. The glue bead comes off with no resistance and no residue. Fortune routinely gets entire beads to come off in a single piece, even turning corners around a joint.

TWO WAYS TO REMOVE THE GLUE

Peel it up. *This works especially well for drips and runs, as long as you do it about an hour after glue-up, when the glue is firm but still flexible.*

Use a chisel in corners. *Come at the bead from both directions. It should just fall away. If not, give it a little pull with your fingers.*

WASH AWAY THE RESIDUE

Clean with denatured alcohol. *The soft bristles of a toothbrush do a good job of pulling the wax off the surface. Then soak up the alcohol and wax right away with a tissue. If you let the alcohol evaporate, some wax remains.*

Sand lightly. *Use P220-grit paper to knock down any grain raised by the denatured alcohol.*

Finish with no worries. *Use whatever you want. There won't be any evidence that the wax (or glue) was ever there.*