Most engineered hardwood floors are approved for glue down or nail down installation. Certain styles can also be floated, but generally speaking the installation choice is between glue and nail.

For my money the best method is full spread glue down, no question. Properly done, a glue down installation ensures a good solid bond of the entire board to the subfloor, minimized board movement during routine shifts in climate conditions and a long-lasting, trouble-free installation. Nail down installations, on the other hand, are on our Top 10 list of Recurring Problems.

So why does nail down remain so persistently popular? Partly because of tradition – many installers are just more comfortable nailing than gluing – and partly because nailing is quicker and cheaper than gluing. That is true, and if your customer is buying a buck-forty-nine laminate, then quickest and cheapest is probably an appropriate choice. But if they are buying a premium quality engineered hardwood floor, they should expect to install it in a manner that befits the product. That is a professional, by the book glue down, and it is worth every dime.

That said, many installers still opt for nail down. What they don’t always realize is that nailing engineered floors is a little trickier than solid products. They’re generally thinner than a solid wood floor and so require a lighter gauge fastener to avoid splitting the tongue; the item of choice is usually a light gauge staple. These fasteners, unfortunately, have less ‘grab’ than their beefier counterparts and are inclined to work loose over time, especially if they are being driven into OSB, as they so frequently are nowadays. (OSB, as we’ve covered in this space before, has significantly less holding power than plywood.) The nail down scenario is further weakened when dealing with a wide plank product, because there are few fasteners per square foot of flooring.

Tip of the Month: When working with any wide plank product, always use a bit of glue on the butt ends of the boards. In this instance, a floating floor glue is appropriate. This is a requirement on any wide plank install, solid or engineered, nail or glue down.

(When we tried to officially prohibit the practice of nailing down engineered floors, we got a lot of angry pushback. Hardcore nailers are a pretty committed bunch, it seems.)

Since banning the practice doesn’t seem to be an option, we can at least offer a pretty good compromise, which we’re calling glue-assisted nail down. Effective immediately, we are recommending this procedure for all nail down installations of any engineered flooring, so listen up.

This procedure uses a small amount of adhesive down the length of each and every board to help secure it to the subfloor. The adhesive can be troweled directly onto the subfloor, or run in a bead down the underside of the board, which I find quicker, cleaner and easier – but your choice.

A key thing is to use an adhesive designed for glue down installation of hardwood flooring, such as Kentwood Pro or Bostik’s Best or APAC 989. Do not use floating floor glues like Decobond, or general purpose construction adhesives like Liquid Nails or PL400.

Using this glue assisted procedure will significantly reduce the problems commonly associated with nailing down engineered product. (For the record, the NWFA recommends this approach for nail down installation of any wide plank product, solid or engineered.)

If you really don’t want to glue your boards directly to the subfloor, another option is to do a ‘floating style’ glue assisted. In this method, the boards are given a bead of floating floor adhesive along the tongue and groove joint, just as you would for a standard floating install, then set into place and nailed. By gluing the boards to each other, the entire floor has a mass that helps keep it in place even if individual staples work loose. It’s much fussier and not as secure as the first method, but it’s still better than nailing alone.