

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE FOR CERAMIC TILE

Floors

Vacuuming or sweeping will remove most dirt from interior tile floors. Occasional damp mopping with clear water will remove most dirt that is tracked in. A neutral cleaner will break down grease and oil but should only be used if needed. All excess residue should be removed and rinsed with clear water. One of the most common problems people have is using a cleaner but not removing the cleaning solution from the floor.

Glazed tiles and most porcelain tiles will not absorb anything. Paint, nail polish and even most glue can be removed with the appropriate solvent without harming the tile—just clean off the solvent residue.

Some tiles can be damaged with acids, such as lemon juice. Use cleaning products that state they are acid-free and wipe up acidic spills immediately.

Cement-based grout will deteriorate from exposure to acids and some cleaners contain enough acid to damage grout with repeated use. Any cleaner that promises to remove mineral spots or even soap scum without scrubbing probably contains acid and will damage grout with repeated usage. If it does not say “acid-free”, use with caution.

A few tiles are very rough, usually to give them increased slip resistance. Even though these tiles cannot be stained, dirt can get trapped in crevices and be difficult to remove by vacuuming or damp mopping. In these cases, a soft brush can be used with a neutral cleaner and water to loosen the dirt, which should then be removed with a sponge mop or wet/dry vacuum.

Counters

Kitchen counters get oil, mild acids and every color of staining material imaginable on a daily basis, so picking a good tile, grout and sealer, as well as getting a good installation are very important. The larger the tile and the smaller the grout joint, the easier it will be to keep a counter looking like new. Medium colors and a little texture are also easier to keep looking good, dark shiny tiles will show streaks. Finally, white grout will almost certainly discolor over time in a kitchen, a little color will make your life easier. If you follow these simple rules you can have tile counters that are not only beautiful and long lasting, but easy to maintain as well.

Floor rated tiles are recommended for kitchen counters because they are impact and scratch resistant. Avoid rough textures—they will make cleaning more difficult. With good tile and small sealed grout joints, a clean dishrag will clean off nearly anything. Use soap for greasy spills and then rinse out the dishrag and remove the residue. Dark tiles will require a pass with a dry towel to remove water streaks. After preparing meat, fish or poultry, it's good to use a highly diluted bleach solution to kill bacteria on counters and breadboards. When you see grout joints begin to darken when they get wet, it's time to re-seal them. With a good sealer, once every few months will be as often as needed.

Walls

After showering, rinse off the walls with clear water. Soap scum and body oils will rinse off easily before they dry but will be hard to clean if they build up. Occasional cleaning with a neutral cleaner will keep things looking good with minimal effort. The best way to prevent mold and mildew is to use an exhaust fan during and after showers and keep shower doors open. With constant heat and moisture, mold will grow on anything, but good ventilation and a fairly simple cleaning schedule will usually keep it from being a problem. Sealing the grout will help keep mold out and occasional bleach-based cleaners can be used, but repeated use of bleach will also lead to grout damage over time. Using exhaust fans will also help prevent mold growing in other places, including your attic and in your walls, so make them a priority and make your life easier.

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