

Preparing to Tile
Level of Difficulty – 3-4

Off to the Store

Measure your room, before leaving to purchase tile. Any tile store or flooring department of a home improvement store can help you to figure how much tile and materials to purchase, based on the square footage of your room. Purchase your tile and materials with the idea that you will make a return at the end of the project. You don't want to be nearly finished and have to run out to get another box of tile or bag of grout.

Choice of tile is mostly a personal preference. Make sure that if you are tiling a floor that you select tile that is appropriately rated and that will withstand weight, drops and heavy traffic. When tiling a back splash you might consider which tile you can easily clean the spaghetti sauce off of!

Typical Materials

- Tile
- Tile Adhesive (Thinset - we recommend that you mix your own)
- Grout
- Caulk (to match grout)
- Grout Sealer
- Surface prep materials (see below)

Typical Tools

- Tile cutter or tile saw
- Notched trowel (typically 1/8" v-groove for walls, 3/16" or 1/4" for flooring)
- Putty Knife
- Tile Spacers
- Grout Float
- Tile Nippers
- Empty buckets (2 or 3), Sponges, rags, towels, lots of clean water
- Caulk Gun

Surface Prep

Surface prep, like painting is absolutely key to a successful tiling job. If your surface isn't properly prepared, you can do a beautiful job of setting, grouting and finishing your tile, but weeks or months down the road you'll start to notice cracks in the grout, that will get progressively worse over time.

For a proper bond, any surface you plan to tile must be free from loose dirt, grime, paint, waxes, oils, adhesives, etc. Use cleaners and strippers as needed to ensure a proper bond

Your surface cannot have noticeable flex under normal conditions, but also consider the amount of weight that your tile will support under unusual conditions like moving in the new fridge! If your surface flexes beneath your tiling job, your grout lines will crack and tiles may come loose.

Some General Guidelines:

- **Backsplash** - To tile a backsplash, clean the wall surface, removing old tile, loose paint, grease, etc.
- **Countertops** - Countertops must be a minimum of 3/4" thick and fastened with no flex. If your existing countertop is made from particle board or shows any swelling from water damage, replace the surface.
- **Bath Surround** – Wall surfaces surrounding a bathtub or shower should be lined with 1/2" tile backer board to prevent water penetration. If you are removing existing tile, chances are you will have to remove the existing gyp board or plaster and replace it with a tile backer board.

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- **Floors** – Move all furniture out of the room and remove all base trim. Uninstall any toilets, pipe flanges, etc.
 - **Cement** - If you are tiling a cement floor, you needn't apply a subsurface for structural purposes. Remove any sealant, loose paint, or adhesives with a floor scraper. Repair any dips with a cement patching compound to make the floor as level as possible.
 - **Wood** – Wood subflooring must be a minimum of 1 ¼" thick. If you have 1 ¼", you can tile directly to this, but verify that it does not flex. If you walk over it and hear a squeak or feel any give, it is flexing. In this case, run 3" sheetrock screws through both layers of plywood, into the floor joists below, making sure the screw head is below the surface of the plywood. Replace any plywood that shows swelling from water damage, particularly beneath toilet stools and near showers and tubs.

If your wood subflooring is less than 1 ¼" thick, add a layer of tile backer board to stabilize the flooring.

Manufacturer's installation instructions for tile backers: There are several brands of tile backer. Here are links to instructions for readily available tile backer boards.

<http://www.k2workshops.org/PDF/Wonderboard.pdf>

<http://www.k2workshops.org/PDF/HardieBacker.pdf>

Laying Out Your Job

Always draw a straight line on your surface that the first row of tile will align to. Mark this line so that when it gets wet, it will still show. If you use a snap a chalk line, go over it with permanent marker. Before you set your first tile, take the time to lay the tiles, using spacers as desired to see how the tile will work on your space. If you find that the last tile would have to be cut to a sliver, try shifting the tiles, starting and ending the row with partial tiles.

If you are tiling a floor, work from the center out. Walls may look square to each other, but if (when) they are slightly off, laying a grid of tile on the floor only magnifies the flaw. Tiles between and around door frames and thresholds can have complicated cuts, so these should be considered before you begin laying the tile.

When tiling a wall, where the top line of tile is visible (not under cabinets) be sure that your guideline is level, even if your tub or counter top is not. You can make up for any discrepancy by cutting the bottom row of tile to match the slope of the tub or counter.