

TILE & STONE CARE & MAINTENANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for purchasing tile. Tile and natural stone are among the most durable surfaces in the home, and there are simple steps to keep them looking their best.

Know Your Tile

- Glazed ceramic and porcelain tile are dense and stain resistant, and need very little maintenance. Polished porcelain should be sealed to help prevent staining.
- Unglazed porcelain, quarry and cement-based tile may need sealing. Check the product specifications.
- Natural stone such as marble, travertine, limestone and slate is porous and softer than porcelain. Marble, travertine and limestone are also sensitive to acids and need extra care.
- Glass, metal and polished stone mosaics scratch more easily and should never be cleaned with abrasives.

General Cleaning

- Use a clean dust mop, soft broom or vacuum with a soft brush attachment to remove dust and debris weekly, depending on foot traffic. Sand and grit act like sandpaper and can scratch polished tile and stone.
- Do not use vacuums with a beater bar, as they can scratch softer stone and chip tile edges.
- Damp mop with warm water and a pH-neutral cleaner made for tile and stone. Change the water often, rinse with clean water and dry to prevent streaks.
- For unglazed tile, use a mild, soap-free, pH-neutral cleaner. Make sure any cleaner you use is also safe for your grout.
- Do not use oil soaps, soap-based or wax-based cleaners. They leave a film that attracts dirt, can make floors slippery and may darken or discolor stone and grout.
- Avoid steam cleaners on natural stone and sealed grout, as heat and moisture can break down sealers.

Heavy Cleaning

- For heavier cleaning of glazed ceramic and porcelain, use a tile cleaner diluted as directed and a nylon scrub brush, then rinse thoroughly.
- Do not use acidic products on marble, travertine, limestone, onyx or cement grout. This includes vinegar, lemon or citrus cleaners, bathroom and tub & tile cleaners, rust removers and grout haze removers. Acids etch the surface, leaving dull marks that cannot be wiped away.

- Do not use bleach or ammonia on a regular basis. They can discolor grout and wear down sealers.
- Do not use abrasive powders, scouring pads, steel wool or wire brushes. They scratch glazed and polished surfaces and can leave metal marks that turn into rust stains on stone.
- Always read and follow the cleaner manufacturer's instructions and test a new cleaner in a hidden area or on a spare tile first. After using any cleaner, rinse with clean water to remove residue.

Consistent general cleaning and dust removal is a more effective maintenance solution than occasional heavy cleaning.

Spills & Spots

Immediately blot up spills with a clean, damp cloth. Blot rather than wipe, to avoid spreading the spill. The following substances can stain or etch natural stone and grout: wine, coffee, tea, fruit juice, soda, vinegar, tomato sauce, cooking oils, cosmetics, hair dye, nail polish remover, harsh cleaning products and rust from metal cans or planters. For oil-based or deep stains, use a poultice made for stone or consult a stone care professional.

Grout Care

- Seal cement-based grout after installation, and reseal every 1–3 years or as needed. To test, place a few drops of water on the grout. If it darkens within a few minutes, it is time to reseal.
- Clean grout routinely with a pH-neutral cleaner and a soft nylon brush. For periodic deep cleaning, use a concentrated tile & grout cleaner that removes soap scum, mildew and body oils. Do not use wire brushes.
- Epoxy grout does not need sealing.
- Flexible sealant (caulk) at corners, tubs and countertops is a maintenance item. Replace it if it cracks, separates or grows mildew, to keep water out of the wall.

Natural Stone

- Seal marble, travertine, limestone, slate and other porous stone with a penetrating sealer. Reseal periodically, typically every 1–3 years, and more often in kitchens, bathrooms and high-traffic areas.
- Sealers slow down staining but do not prevent etching. Etch marks (dull spots from acids) are surface damage, not stains. Polished stone can be professionally honed and repolished.
- Use coasters, trays and mats under glasses, toiletries, cleaning bottles and plants.
- Polished stone may lose some shine in high-traffic areas over time. This is normal wear.
- Holes in travertine may open up over time. They can be filled with a color-matched stone filler.
- Some natural stone may change color slightly over time with exposure to sunlight and use. This is a natural characteristic of stone.

Choosing a Sealer

Sealers are made for different materials and finishes, so check that the one you choose is labeled for your tile, stone and grout. Two common types are:

Natural (non-enhancing) sealer

A penetrating sealer for porous stone, tile and grout. It protects against stains and water without changing the color of the material.

Available in solvent-based and water-based formulas.

Enhancing sealer

A penetrating sealer for porous stone, tile and grout. It protects against stains and water, and also darkens and enriches the look of natural stone, tile and grout.

Available in solvent-based and water-based formulas.

Because an enhancing sealer permanently changes the color of the material, test any sealer on a spare tile or a hidden area first and let it dry fully before deciding. When resealing, use the same type of sealer that was applied originally, or check with the sealer manufacturer that the two are compatible.

Glass & Specialty Mosaics

- Clean mosaics with warm water and a soft cloth. For deeper cleaning, a mild detergent or glass cleaner can be used on glass mosaics.
- Clean metal mosaics with a soft cloth. Never use abrasive sponges or strong chemicals, which can damage the finish, and dry them after cleaning. Metal mosaics are not recommended in showers, tub surrounds, pools, spas or exterior areas.
- Care for stone pieces in mixed-material mosaics the same way as natural stone.

Bathrooms & Showers

- Run the exhaust fan during and after showers, and squeegee walls after use to reduce soap scum, hard water spots and mildew.
- Use a daily shower cleaner that is labeled safe for natural stone where stone is installed.

Protect

Place mats at all entrances to keep dirt and grit off the floor. Clean mats regularly and use breathable, non-staining mats. Rubber-backed mats can trap moisture and discolor stone. Use felt pads or non-staining floor protectors under furniture legs, and replace them regularly to prevent grit buildup. Tile can chip or crack if heavy or sharp objects are dropped on it.

Moving

When moving heavy furniture or appliances, place a sheet of Masonite or plywood under the piece being moved to distribute the weight and avoid scratching, chipping or cracking. Never drag appliances across tile. For light pieces use a clean blanket or a piece of carpet face down under the piece to be moved.

Outdoor & Patio Tile

- Sweep regularly and rinse with a garden hose. If using a pressure washer, use low pressure with a wide fan tip, and keep the nozzle away from grout and sealant joints.
- Remove leaves, bark and other organic debris promptly, as they can stain stone. For moss or algae in shaded areas, use a cleaner made for exterior tile and stone.
- In winter, use a plastic shovel. Do not use rock salt or chemical de-icers on natural stone, cement grout or sealed surfaces, as they can cause flaking and surface damage. Use sand for traction or a de-icer labeled safe for stone and pavers.
- A white powdery deposit (efflorescence) may appear as moisture moves through the installation. Brush it off when dry, or use an efflorescence remover suitable for the material. If it keeps returning, check for drainage or water problems.
- Raise planters on feet to prevent water rings and rust stains, and reseal exterior stone more often than interior stone.

Removing Wax & Coatings

If wax or a topical coating has been applied to glazed ceramic or porcelain, remove it with a sealer & adhesive remover made for tile. Test a small area first, work in small sections and follow the product label. Agitate lightly with a nylon pad as the coating softens, then rinse with clean water and dry.

Repair

Keep spare tiles from the same lot for future repairs. A cracked or chipped tile can be replaced by a professional without disturbing the surrounding tile. Consult your tile or stone professional to fix etching, deep stains, loose or hollow-sounding tiles, or any other difficult problem. Inspect tile periodically and have damaged tiles replaced promptly to keep water out of the installation.

The suggestions in this guide are for general practice. For a particular project, or if you are unsure, consult a professional installer or stone restoration specialist. BuildDirect is not responsible for the results of any third-party care & maintenance products.