



Tiling basics

A professional tiling installation that adds beauty and value requires careful preparation of the surface, the correct match between the tiles and the adhesive, the right tools and common sense.

Before starting

Check the surface to be tiled and prepare as per the surface preparation section in this website. Make sure the surfaces are clean and free from dust. Tape over cupboards to stop dust from getting in and cover surfaces that may be damaged by falling tools or tiles e.g. counter tops.

Check your tiles

As slight variations in colour can occur from batch to batch, make sure your tiles come from the same batch by checking the side of the box. Open a few boxes and choose and reference tile that is a match in colour and texture to the tile chosen at the store.

Using this tile, check the rest for colour and texture and remove any tiles that vary too greatly (some makes of tiles are designed to have large variations – check at the store if you are unsure). Mixing and matching tiles from different boxes will often give a more uniform finish. Make sure to remove the dust at the back of the tiles with a damp cloth. This will ensure better contact between the adhesive and tile i.e. a stronger bond.

Plan your layout

Very few walls are straight and true so it is unwise to use the corners to provide a line to align the tiles to be laid. Rather use the centre point of the area to be tiled by measuring the middle of each wall, drawing a perpendicular line to the wall on the opposite wall. This will divide the area into quarters. Starting from the centre, lay 2 rows of tiles along the lines using spacers to ensure the correct widths. Adjust the rows to avoid narrow strips along edges to give the area a balanced look once tiled. When tiling around features (i.e. a bath, window sill etc.) adjust the reference lines to allow for a row of cut tiles around the feature. Remember that the reference lines affect the whole area to be tiled so take time to plan well.

Laying tiles

When tiling walls and floors, it is a good idea to start with the walls to prevent damaging the newly tiled floors. Mix the bag of adhesive thoroughly as per the directions on the back of the bag. This will ensure the correct consistency and proper adhesion.

Do not mix too much adhesive at a time as bond strengths reduce rapidly if the adhesive stands too long and begins to set. Use the correct notched trowel to apply the adhesive. Only apply enough adhesive to lay 4 – 5 tiles at a time to make certain that the adhesive does not dry out. Use a twisting action to bed the tile into the adhesive and ensure good contact. If the tiles have uneven backs, butter the backs with adhesive prior to bedding to eliminate any hollow points. Use spacers to keep the distances between tiles consistent. Once the adhesive is reasonably dry and the tiles are firmly in place, remove the spacers and the excess adhesive from between the tiles. Clean the tiles with a damp sponge to remove all excess adhesive before its sets completely.

Grouting and cleaning

Make sure all the excess adhesive has been removed from between the joints during the installation of the tiles. This adhesive is extremely difficult to remove once set.

Let the tile adhesive set completely before grouting i.e. 24 hours for normal adhesives or 6 hours for rapid setting adhesives

Mix the grout as per the directions on the back of the bag to ensure the correct consistency. Too much water will cause the grout to crack and sag once set. Press the grout into the joints with a grout squeegee using a criss-cross action making sure that the joints are completely filled. Smooth the grout and work away excess grout with the squeegee. Do not leave to get hard. Allow the grout to set for between 1 and 2 hours before cleaning with a damp (not wet) sponge. Leave the grout to set for 24 hours before polishing the tiles with a soft dry cloth (Please note a wet cloth will not remove the thin film of grout from the tiles.)