

# Ceramic tile is durable, good looking flooring

If you have a foyer with hardwood, vinyl or carpeted flooring, you know how tough it can be to protect the surface from dirt and water. Installing glazed ceramic tile solves all these problems.

It's as durable as any flooring tile you can use, easy to maintain and looks new almost indefinitely. And it comes in a variety of colors and patterns — subdued earth tones, bright pastels, or with hand-painted figuring.

Pick a color to match your foyer. A dark, slightly mottled surface texture with satin glaze looks unobtrusive and makes for a less slippery surface than highly glazed tile. It also makes cleanup easy.

A solid foundation is essential if you want your ceramic floor to last. You can lay the tile directly

over the existing floor, and this will make the job simpler. Be sure the floor has no give, and that its surface will provide good bond for the tile.

If you want a near-level transition from the tiles surface to the adjoining hardwood or other flooring, remove the existing flooring first. This also allows enough clearance for the front door to swing over a mat or small throw rug.

Start taking up flooring by removing the baseboard and quarter-round from the walls. If you plan to reuse this trim, pry it off carefully. Then establish the line where the tile will abut the adjacent flooring. In most cases, this line will be decided for you by the end of the wall of the foyer. However, if your floor plan lets you

choose an arbitrary line, you might consider the tile size, plus the width of the grout spaces, and allow full, uncut tiles along the front and back edges.

After marking the cutoff line at exact right angles to the walls, use a circular saw to cut this division between tile and existing flooring. Set blade-protrusion at the thickness of the surface flooring. Remove the flooring from the area to be tiled and pull out the protruding nails.

With the subflooring exposed, glue and nail down exterior-grade plywood subflooring. The plywood should be thick enough to bring the surface of the tile just a fraction of an inch lower than the surface of the adjoining floor. When calculating this height, allow slightly less than one-eighth-inch for the thickness of the tile mastic. For a smooth and stable surface, cover the plywood with a latex underlayment sealer.

With a fairly small foyer, lay out the tiles on the subfloor to determine the starting point. Carefully set each tile along a steel rule allowing equal grout spaces between tiles. You can also get precision tile spacers, avail-

able from tile suppliers, to assure uniform spacing. Some tiles are made with built-in separators to keep the grout spaces equal.

With the tiles in position, mark the floor area in squares. For a small area, you can mark each tile on the subfloor. This provides precise tile placement and helps to assure straight lines and consistent grout widths. For larger areas, lay out workable squares of four, six or nine tiles in each direction. Make your marks, pick up the tiles and snap chalk lines.

Tile adhesives are available ready-mixed, but for a heavy-traffic floor like a foyer, three-part epoxy mastic is more durable. Mix the three parts together to the consistency recommended on the product package. Spread the mixed mastic with a notched trowel with three-eighths-inch teeth. Apply the mastic evenly within a marked square leaving the chalk lines exposed. Work a square containing six to 15 tiles at a time, depending on how fast you work and how many tiles you have to cut.

If you spread the mastic too far in advance, it may dry before you can place all the tiles. You should

be able to do most of your cutting before spreading the mastic to avoid dry-out.

Cutting ceramic tile is not hard if you have the proper tools. Most tile dealers rent these cutting tools. A tile cutter scores a squared line across the surface of a tile, then breaks it cleanly along that line. A hand-held tile nipper trims away small amounts of tile and cuts slaps to fit around obstructions like heating pipes. Since the baseboard and quarter-round molding cover the edge, you don't have to make a perfectly straight line at the wall. Do make clean cuts around door casings where the edge will show and leave space for grout.

Place each tile carefully within the square, aligning the first row with a central chalk line. Align the second row with adjoining tiles. Give each tile a slight twist as you place it to assure good transfer of adhesive onto the back of the tile. Press down firmly on each tile until you see mastic squeeze slightly out from under all four edges. Periodically check your work for straight alignment and equal spacing.

Let the adhesive dry for 12 hours before applying grout. Grouts, like tile adhesives, come in powder form and premixed. Use a powder if exact color match matters. For floor use, add a latex groutreinforcer. Allow the mix to set for several minutes before starting to be sure you have

completely integrated the latex additive blend.

Spread the grout generously over the tiles using a rubber grout float to force it down into the spaces between the tiles. After 20 minutes, wipe the surface with a damp sponge.

Generally, the grout line should be kept slightly below the curve of the top edge of the tile. This reduces cleavage maintenance later. However, you can set the grout in the lower grooves if you would like the overall surface to have a more textured appearance. Strike the grout lines with a smooth, rounded instrument. The rounded handle of an old toothbrush works well.

Let the grout dry overnight, then use a coarse cloth, like burlap, to scrub away the powdery film on the tile surface. Scrub along the rounded edges of the tiles to remove any excess grout. This done, you can re-nail the baseboard and the quarter-round. After three days, apply silicone grout sealer to keep it from absorbing dirt and make cleaning easier.

Do not wax or apply other surface coatings to a ceramic tiled floor and don't drop anything heavy on it that could crack the tile. It needs no other special care except annual scrubbing and re-coating with silicone grout sealer. By Popular Mechanics for AF Special Features

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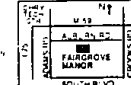
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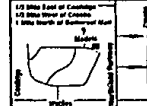
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