

LET'S REMODEL

You need strong base for ceramic tile

Q: I would like to have ceramic tile installed in my kitchen. I have had two contractors out to give me an estimate on the project. One contractor said he was going to glue the tile to the plywood. The other contractor said he was going to put down a "mud" base, then put the tile over the base. Which method is better?

A: A single layer of plywood is completely insufficient. You must add "underlayment" prior to installing the ceramic tile. However, it is important to inspect the floor joist spans before you proceed. Ceramic tile is a very rigid material. Most ceramic tiles will crack if there is movement underneath the tile. Some wood floor systems when designed to minimum standards have too much flex in them. The flex of "bounce" will crack tiles.

Floor joists are basically wood "I" beams for a given floor joist, or you increase the distance between supports. The joist will deflect a great amount. Floor joist beneath ceramic tile floors must not deflect more than 1/360 of their span. Assuming your joists are No. 1 grade and the span is no greater than 16 feet, 9 inches, you can proceed. You have two choices of underlayment:



3/8 inch exterior grade plywood or 1/2 inch Cementitious board. Both will perform exceptionally as long as you install them carefully. Your existing sub floor should be securely attached to the floor joists. Drywall screws work well, use ones that have coarse threads.

If you choose to use exterior plywood, the spacing of the sheets is critical. The 3/8 inch plywood edges must be offset from existing plywood edges at least 2 inches in each direction. You must also be sure to maintain a 1/8 inch spacing around each sheet of plywood. The plywood expands with changes in humidity. If spaced too tightly, the plywood will buckle and crack the tile. Attach the

plywood with nails or screws that will penetrate the floor joists at 3/4 inch. Be sure to screw the edges.

Cementitious board makes a great underlayment, but it requires some additional labor. It is necessary to install the Cementitious board in a layer of fresh thin set or dry set mortar. This material acts as a filler for low spots in the plywood. Without this layer of thin set, the board may flex under foot traffic causing the ceramic tile to crack. The Cementitious board is attached to the existing plywood and floor joists with galvanized nails and screws. If you choose exterior plywood as underlayment, you must use an organic adhesive or an epoxy mortar as a bonding agent between the tile and the wood. A latex modified Portland cement mortar will create long lasting adhesive should you decide to the Cementitious board underlayment. Remember without a stiff floor your ceramic tile job is doomed to failure.

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For your home improvement questions or a copy of our roster booklet, call Gayle Walters, executive director of the

Michigan Remodeling Association (MRA) at 810-335-3232, or send questions to "Let's Remodel," 2187 Orchard Lake Road, No. 103, Sylvan Lake, MI 48320. Answers are provided by members of the MRA, the local chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). Members include professional contractors, manufacturers, wholesalers, consultants and lenders representing all facets of residential and light commercial remodeling. Members also answer questions on "Construction Talk with Murray Gula on WEXL-AM 1340, 1-2 p.m. Saturday. You can call in your questions at 810-544-1340.

Cactus show slated Saturday

The Michigan Cactus and Succulent Society will have its annual judged show 1-4 p.m. Saturday, June 8, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 814 N. Campbell, Royal Oak.

The public may attend. Admission is free.

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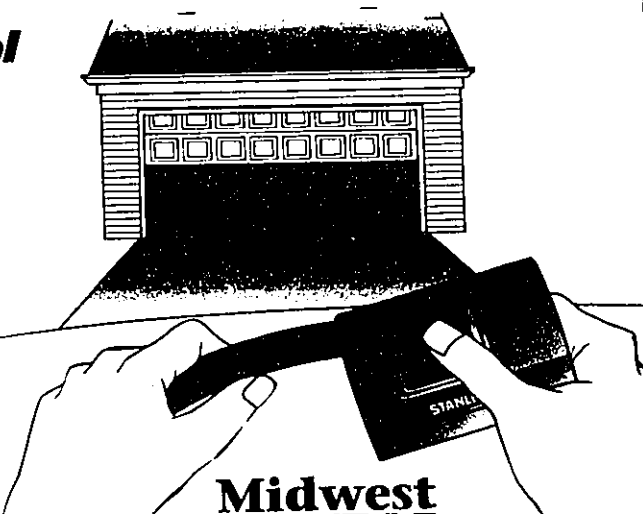
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