

HOW TO PROPELY CARE FOR YOUR TILE



Tile adds a unique, artistic touch to your home or commercial building regardless of where you use it. In order to lengthen the life of the tile and keep it looking its best, you need to know how to clean it properly. We will look at four types of tile and also discuss cleaning the equally important grout. There are a few overall topics to discuss first:



BLEACH IS BLECH

When most homeowners think about cleaning the bathroom, the first thought is BLEACH for a deep down, germ-free clean. However, using high pH cleaners such as bleach and even low pH cleaners like vinegar should never be used on tile as a **regular** cleaner because they can break down some sealers. Sealers prevent dirt, soap scum, and oils from penetrating the grout. If there's a mold or mildew problem, it could be that the substrate is retaining water. No cleaner can fix that. Call a tile specialist.

RINSE THOROUGHLY

After cleaning tile with soap, or other cleaner, and washing it off with water, always follow up with a thorough final rinse using fresh, clean water to ensure all soap or cleaner residue is removed. Otherwise the tile will look dull.



JUST SAY NO TO VOCs

Be sure to use proper cleaners regardless of the type of tile. Tile cleaners can be found at most any home improvement store. Cleaners should contain non-polluting chemicals and low Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) levels. Keep in mind that products will vary depending on the application, the amount of traffic, and the area in which the tile is placed. Whatever you chose make sure it's also compatible for cleaning the grout.



START OUT MILD

The best way to clean any tile is to start with the mildest solution first and if that doesn't clean it properly, work your way up gradually to stronger products. Always read the label to ensure the cleaner won't damage the tile or grout.



CERAMIC TILE



Ceramic tile can be found most anywhere in the home from bathroom walls to kitchen counters and floors. The first thing you want to do is remove any dust or loose dirt from the surface. Use a broom, a soft, dry dust mop or a vacuum. When using the vacuum, you might want to use the pliable, brush attachment to avoid scratches from the vacuum on the tile or grout. If there is any surface debris that doesn't come up with vacuuming, use a scraper or putty knife to remove it carefully.

Next up, either have the cleaner ready or prepare the solution. Then clean the tiles and grout joints thoroughly following the manufacturer's instructions. Rinse thoroughly with clean, warm water and let dry. If you see streaks of residue it could be leftover cleaning solution, so give it a second rinsing. Especially if it's floor tile, be sure the entire area is dry before allowing anyone to walk on it.

CERAMIC POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Clean up spills as soon as possible. Any liquid left on the tile may be drawn into the porous surface or ground into the tile or grout.
- Dry dust mopping, sweeping, or vacuuming is recommended daily and also before cleaning so debris doesn't build up.
- Use an all-purpose low VOC cleaner that will not scratch tile and is compatible with the grout joints.
- The type of product can vary depending on the type of dirt or stain that needs to be removed.
- A multipurpose spray cleaner to remove soap scum, hard water deposits and mildew can be used on wall tile areas in residential bathrooms and showers.
- Use a cotton mop, cloth, sponge, or non-metallic brush to apply and work in the cleaner.
- Rinse the area with clean water and dry thoroughly. We can't say this enough – never use a cleaner with harsh chemicals because they can damage tile.



NO SCRUB CLEANERS

For the occasional deep clean, there are commercial cleaning products can cut down on scrubbing time. Most simply spray on then let it sit for the recommended time and viola, simply sponge off the cleaner then thoroughly rinse. Of course there will be times when you need to scrub the build-up on shower tiles or grout.



AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY CLEAN

You can get a deep clean by using a steam cleaner that also has an attachment for grout cleaning. Nylon scrub brushes are generally safe for grout and tiles, but brass bristle scrub brushes on tile are a huge no-no! While cleaning with a steamer, it's best to stop every once and awhile to rinse and sponge up the dirty water. Otherwise it can settle back into the grout. So rinse as you go.





PORCELAIN TILES

Porcelain is the most popular tile for floors, walls, and countertops in residential and commercial buildings. The tiles are hard wearing and ideal for high foot traffic areas. To ensure the longevity of these tiles, clean them once or twice weekly. Porcelain tile can last for decades as long as it's well cared for.



HOW TO CLEAN

Regular cleaning with warm water and mild soap will keep floors looking their best. Use a gentle, everyday multipurpose cleaner to remove soap scum, hard water deposits, and mildew on bathroom walls and floors. Just like ceramic tiles, porcelain tiles need to dry thoroughly after cleaning and rinsing.

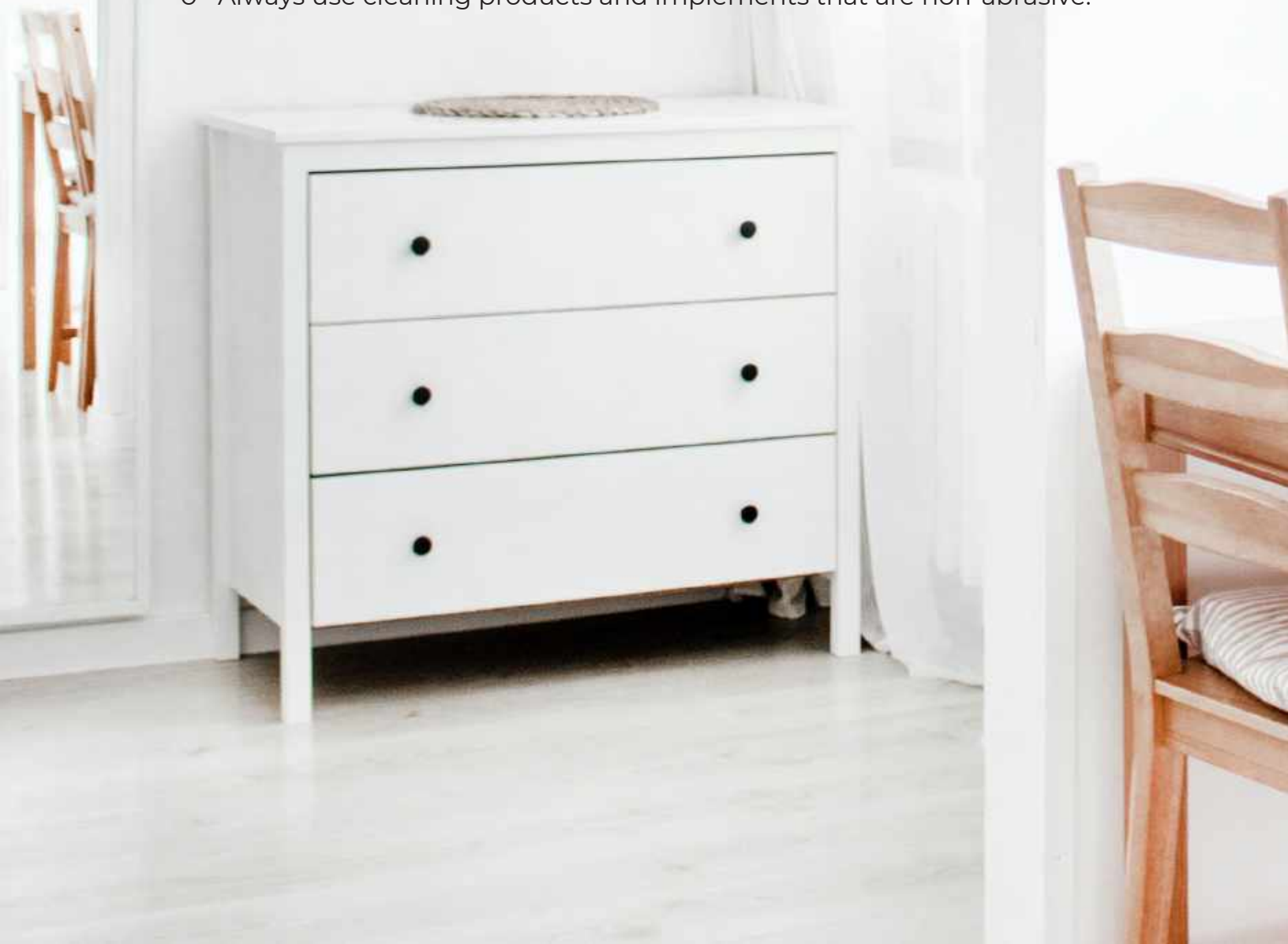
Have unglazed tile? It should be Atrated tile cleaners. These cleaners are better for removing grease, oils and normal spills from unglazed products. Not sure what to use? Call your tile specialist or local home improvement store.

PORCELAIN POINTS TO REMEMBER:

While porcelain is resistant to scratches, etching and stains, it is not damage proof.

- o Porcelain and ceramic tiles are not the same. Porcelain is actually a subtype of ceramic. It's made from a blend of sand, feldspar, and refined white clay that is baked at a higher temperature, so the water content is less than ceramic. That means porcelain is tougher, denser, and less porous.

- o If you drop something heavy on it, the tile can chip or crack.
- o Never use permanent markers or dyes around porcelain. You may think that sounds far-fetched but because we're saying it means someone has done it! If it happens rinse the area with water as soon as possible then apply an approved cleaner. Rinse and dry thoroughly. No guarantees that the stain will come out, but you can try.
- o Porcelain is stain-resistant to juices, wine, coffee, and other substances. Still, it's best to wipe up these spills immediately.
- o When using knives to chop food, be sure to put a cutting board underneath.
- o Do not chop vegetables or even slice bread directly on a porcelain countertop.
- o Remove loose dust or debris before applying cleaner.
- o Always use cleaning products and implements that are non-abrasive.



POLISHED, TEXTURED OR MATTE

Depending on the type of porcelain tile the cleaning process can be slightly different. Polished porcelain tiles require the least amount of maintenance. To clean, dilute the regular solution to half the strength used on most surfaces. Once clean, simply rinse thoroughly and dry with a clean cloth for a glossy finish.



Textured tiles add depth to walls and floors. The texture requires a bit more maintenance than the polished versions, but it's not too much work. As with all tile cleaning, start by removing surface dirt and dust with a vacuum or brush. Saturate the surface with a neutral cleaner and allow it to settle for 10 minutes. This gives the cleaner time to get into the nooks and crannies. Scrub the tiles with a soft-bristle brush, working in two directions to get the dirt out of every crevice. Allow to dry.

Matte tiles are easier to clean than polished tiles mainly because you'll need to clean them less. The indents in matte tiles are large and shallow, so dirt is easily washed away. Apply a vinegar-and-water solution and let it to soak for five to ten minutes. Just like the textured tile, matte tile should be cleaned using a soft-bristle brush and working in two directions for a better clean. Rinse with fresh, clear water to remove all the cleaning solution. For the finishing touch, use a damp mop.



NATURAL STONE

Natural stone adds beauty, strength and welcomes the outdoors to the interior of a home. It adds a unique touch to a home since no two pieces are exactly alike.

Natural stone requires special care and maintenance to keep it looking its best.

HOW TO CLEAN

Countertops and floors need regular cleaning with concentrated pH neutral cleaners that are specifically designed for stone so the cleaner will not affect the existing sealers or coatings. As with all types of tile, natural stone cleaners should not contain acid or bleach. Even a diluted solution of vinegar and water, can etch and will eventually damage many types of natural stone.



Apply the proper solution to the stone surface using a spray bottle or sponge. Let the solution sit per the manufacturer's recommended amount of time to ensure the cleaner has time to penetrate the stone. Use a sponge or soft bristle brush to loosen dirt and grime. With a clean sponge remove the dirty solution and then buff dry. Depending on the type of stone there may be a different cleaning method or additional procedures needed.



BRING IN THE BIG GUNS

For heavy duty cleaning, use a heavy-duty stone cleaner and degreaser to effectively remove dirt, grease, grime, waxes, etc. These cleaning products are designed to deep clean the stone without damaging it.

Apply the solution as per the manufacturer's instructions. Let it sit for the recommended amount of time. As the instructions above, use a soft bristle brush or sponge to agitate. Change out the cleaning solution approximately every 100 square feet to avoid using dirty water during the cleaning process.

To remove, use a clean sponge, then buff dry. Rinse thoroughly with clean water when finished. Make sure liquids do not sit on any type of natural stone for too long and be sure to dry the surface thoroughly. Spills should always be cleaned up as soon as possible.

TO SEAL OR NOT TO SEAL

Sealing is strongly recommended for all stone to provide maximum stain protection. A high quality sealer will protect natural stone. Newly installed natural stone countertops are often sealed at the time of installation, but to be sure, check with the manufacturer regarding their sealing regimen. Sealing every couple of years will ensure your stone continues to look its best.

NATURAL STONE POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- o For countertops, use coasters under all glasses, especially if they contain alcohol or citrus juices.
- o Use trivets under hot dishes and placemats under dinnerware. Protect from objects that could scratch the surface.
- o For calcareous stones, many types of food and drink contain acids that will etch or dull the stone surface.
- o Cracked tiles allow dirt and other debris to accumulate. This may require that the tiles be replaced, or at a minimum, filled.
- o Knowing if a stain is organic, oil-based, acidic, etc., will help identify the stain removal technique needed. Also, the level of stains or spills the stone can be exposed to will determine if an application of a sealer is appropriate.
- o Don't use a worn out vacuum cleaner since the metal, plastic attachments, or wheels could scratch the stone's surface.
- o Normally, it takes the average person about eight steps across a floor to remove sand or dirt from the bottom of his/her shoes.
- o Use non-slip mats or area rugs inside and outside an entrance to minimize tracked in dirt, sand, and grit that will scratch stone flooring.
- o Due the porous nature of natural stone tiles, normal maintenance should include periodic inspections. Ensure stones are well protected and clean.

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR CLEANING

BATH AND OTHER WET AREAS

Use a squeegee to minimize soap scum after each shower. That way it's easier to remove using a non-acidic soap scum remover. For heavy duty cleaning **ONLY** use a solution of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of ammonia to a gallon of water. Never use ammonia on a regular basis because it will dull the stone's surface over time.



OUTDOOR POOL AND PATIO AREAS

In outdoor pool, patio, or hot tub areas, flush with clear water and use a mild bleach solution to remove algae or moss.



EXTERIOR STONE

Large areas of stone usually found on exterior applications make it impractical to perform normal maintenance on a regular basis. However, there should be a periodic overall cleaning to remove accumulated pollutants. Easily accessible stone surfaces such as steps, walkways, etc., should be debris free by periodically sweeping and washing with water.



CEMENT TILE

Cement tiles are made of concrete; and mineral pigments are what create the pattern. The pigments are mixed and poured into a mold. The mold is removed and cement is used to fill the rest of the tile. The tile is then hydraulically pressed and cured for about three weeks.





ABSORBENT

Like stone, cement tiles are highly absorbent and require special treatments for cleaning and protection. With proper care, these tiles will look beautiful for many years. After evaluating their properties, you can determine the specific products needed for cleaning and protecting them, especially in areas like the kitchen and bathroom. A degreasing detergent is often recommended. NEVER use acid products, white spirit solvents, or ammonia.

PROTECT & STAIN-PROOF

When applying a protective treatment to cement tile floors, the floor must be perfectly dry. Otherwise it will block the humidity evaporation from under the tiles, leaving damp marks.

There are solvent-based and water-based stain-proofing agents. You can apply them yourself or the tile company may do it. Verify before the tiles are installed.



FINISHING WAX

Protect floor tiles with finishing wax. The wax protects against dirt and grime brought in by foot traffic. This process can also restore the pure beauty of original tiles, while at the same time highlighting their color and design. Wax, however, isn't recommended for bathrooms or other wet rooms. For decorated cement bathroom tiles, use a specially formulated cleaner a couple times a year or when tiles are dirty. Follow cleaning with a coat of wax.



CEMENT TILE POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Cement tiles are highly absorbent.
- This tile category must be treated immediately after being installed, and then sealed to ensure longevity.
- To keep the floor looking smooth, clean it regularly with a pH neutral detergent. A natural patina will develop over time as the floor naturally wears.
- For the first weeks after installation, the tiles will develop some calcium (a white powder) that is easily removed with a damp cloth or by sweeping the floor.
- If there is still a calcium appearance after some time, there may be humidity under the floor. Contact a tile specialist.
- Use walk-off mats at entrances to avoid abrasive grit that can damage tiles.

GROUT

Cementitious grout is porous, which means it can absorb stains. Because of this, many homeowners choose to seal their grout. Epoxy grout is far less porous so it's almost as stain proof as tile.

Removing stains from cementitious grout can be tricky. Grout is made of cement and sand. Most cleaners will not affect sand. However, cement is alkaline-based and can be dissolved by acids. That means never use vinegar on cementitious grout. Use an alkaline cleaner instead. Check with a tile professional to determine what commercial cleaner to use.



NO OIL OR WAX-BASED SOAPS

Since grout can absorb a stain, it can also absorb soap. Therefore, never use an oil or wax-based cleaner on grout since it can leave behind an oily or waxy film. Even good alkaline cleaners, if not properly rinsed, will leave a sticky soap film. The moral of this story is rinse well. Twice if need be. If soap film is left behind, it will attract dirt. That creates a never-ending cycle of cleaning. So do it right the first time and skip the oil or wax-based soaps.



STEAM IT OR VAC IT

If conventional methods have not worked to get the grout clean, try using a pressurized steam cleaner. If you have a shop vacuum use the attachment to suck up dirty water. This lifts the dirt off the joint. Rinse with clean water and vacuum that up, too. Any remaining soapy film will be removed.

GROUT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- o To prevent cementitious grout from staining, seal it.
- o Penetrating sealers are more expensive and also more durable.
- o Neither sealing cementitious grout nor using an epoxy grout will guarantee against surface buildup or discoloration. Grout needs to be cleaned on a periodic basis to remove surface buildup.
- o There are four common types of stains: grease/oil, soap scum, hard water deposits, and rust.
- o For stubborn stains, agitate with a fiber or nylon-type scrubbing pad.
- o Cleaners should contain non-polluting chemicals and low VOC levels. They should also be compatible with the tile. Check the nearest home improvement center.



CONCLUSION

For daily cleaning, we highly recommend nothing but warm water. If you prefer using chemicals to clean, we can give you a custom recommendation based on the type of tile, where it's located, etc. You can also find high quality products at your local tile supplier. If you prefer to use something that you have on hand already, 1/4 tsp. of mild dish detergent for several gallons of warm water should suffice for regular cleaning. If you need a deeper cleaning for ceramic or porcelain tile you can use 1/4 cup of white vinegar to 3 gallons of water, although keep in mind vinegar is an acid and must be used with caution! When in doubt try testing a small amount of cleaner in an inconspicuous area first.

We hope you've learned enough about tile and grout cleaning to feel confident about it and will make at least a weekly habit of cleaning your tile. Whether it's in the kitchen, bathroom, or on the floor of your home or patio, tile definitely adds something special to a home.



SOURCES:

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