

What to Look For in Buying --

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SMOOTH FLOOR COVERING

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In almost every home there is at least one area where a smooth surface floor covering is used because it can be kept clean so easily. At one time linoleum and printed enamel felt base flooring were the only choices. But in the last 10 years new formulations and improvement in design have been spectacular. Now you can choose from a wide range of colors, patterns and textures in each of the different types of flooring for a distinctive decorating scheme. Each material has its own characteristics and some work better in certain areas than others.

WHAT DETERMINES CHOICE

Differences in Costs

Select the flooring which best meets your needs. In shopping around you will find differences in cost. Cost varies with materials used, gauge or thickness of the wear layer, the color and styling. The thicker the gauge, the higher the price. Light colors and special designs are usually in a higher price group. Costs for installation vary with the detail of the pattern and local costs of labor and materials.

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COMPARISONS IN COSTS OF MATERIALS:

Lowest Cost Group

Printed enamel felt base
Rotogravure vinyl
Asphalt tile — light colors cost more than dark colors

Medium Cost Group

Grease resistant asphalt tile
Linoleum and linoleum tile
Backed vinyls and backed vinyl tile
Vinyl asbestos tile

Highest Cost Group

Vinyl tile (solid type)
Rubber tile
Cork tile

Differences in Maintenance

For ease of upkeep, buy a flooring material that is smooth, non-absorbent, neutral in color and joins the walls with a cove or curved edge instead of at right angles. Solid colors show soil more than patterned materials.

Floor coverings vary in their resistance to grease and household acids and stains. In kitchens and workrooms you want stain and grease resistant finishes.

Heavy traffic in certain areas means hard wear. For such areas select a heavier gauge (thicker wear layer). New and improved materials make it possible to use lighter gauges of some flooring materials.

Floor coverings will not hide rough, uneven subfloors and may crack because of them. A good base, therefore, increases the life expectancy of floor coverings.

Heavy furniture causes indentations in some types of floor coverings. Protect the floor with furniture cups and wide casters. If it dents badly under pressure, its appearance is impaired and it becomes difficult to clean.

Differences in Resiliency

A floor covering with resiliency has "spring" or give. If it has resiliency it is considered comfortable to walk on and stand on. However, the fact that a floor covering, linoleum or asphalt tile, will indent under long-time pressure, as provided by heavy furniture or table legs, is not a measure of resiliency.

The Small Homes Council reports National Bureau of Standards tests show that for all practical purposes affecting human fatigue, there is no more "give" under the heel or foot in wood, asphalt tile, rubber tile or inlaid linoleum than there is in concrete. Of greater significance is the difference in resilience between rubber and leather heels and soles. Resilience has value in that a flooring with little resilience is likely to be noisy, thus making it uncomfortable for many people.

Differences in Noise

Flooring in itself does not absorb much noise. There are some differences in the amount of noise different floorings create when walked on. If it is a busy, much used room, you may want to look for a smooth floor covering that is quiet underfoot.

Differences in Resistance to Alkali and Moisture

Only certain types of floor coverings can be laid on concrete in direct contact with the ground. Moisture from the earth travels up to concrete floors and through their porous composition when these floors are laid directly on the ground.

Asphalt tile was formerly the only covering to install over concrete below grade (basements) but vinyl asbestos is now considered suitable for this location. Rubber tile and homogeneous tile may be used in instances where manufacturers have developed special adhesive where moisture and alkali are problems. A reliable dealer will keep you informed about which floor covering may be installed below grade (basement) or over concrete-slab construction. When building, consider using a moisture barrier under the concrete.

Differences in Pattern and Texture

A little pattern on a floor can be a dangerous thing. If it moves and shifts as you look at it, the pattern can make you uncomfortable. The pattern must lie flat so that the floor retains its quality as a floor.

If the room already has lots of decoration, adding a decorative pattern on the floor will not improve it.

The most common patterns are:

- Marbled — An over-all design that hides dirt and scuffmarks.
- Striated — Colored graining going in one direction. This is called Jaspe in linoleum. Broad striations are called "brushed-stroke".

- Straight-lined — Different colored pieces set onto backing material to form geometric and plaid designs.
- Embossed — A textured design, parts of the design being depressed slightly so that the rest stands out in relief. Usually found in linoleum.
- Spattered — Multicolored spots.

LINOLEUM

Linoleum contains linseed oil, powdered cork or wood flour, a variety of gums and color pigments. It is machine-pressed on a backing, usually of felt. It is bought in rolls 6 feet wide or 9 x 9-inch tiles. It is made in thicknesses of 3/32-inch for normal home use, 5/64-inch for light trafficked areas, and 1/8-inch for heavy wear.

Alkali makes linoleum porous and brittle, so use as little water and soap, or detergents, as possible. It is resistant to grease, quiet underfoot and resists denting quite well.

ASPHALT TILE

Asphalt tile is a compound of asbestos, binders, plasticizers and color pigment. Except for dark colors there is very little asphalt in asphalt tile. It is brittle and requires a firm, smooth underflooring so tile will not crack. It is only fair in dent resistance.

Two kinds of asphalt tile are available, standard and grease resistant. It comes in 9 x 9-inch tiles of 1/8-inch and 3/16-inch thickness.

It is resistant to water, acids, alkalies and fire, but is damaged by grease, oil, turpentine and various solvents, unless it is of the grease resistant type.

RUBBER

Rubber tile is made by vulcanizing pure rubber and pigments under pressure. Synthetic rubber, fine cotton fibers and mineral filler are sometimes used. Tile sizes are 6 x 6-inches to 18 x 36-inches. Thicknesses are 5/64-inch, 3/32-inch and 1/8-inch (usual for home use). It is highly resistant to denting by furniture. Oil, grease and solvents cause pitting and color bleeding. Some manufacturers say their product is resistant to kitchen grease. Do not use lacquers, varnish, shellac and alkaline cleaners as they cause rubber tile to dry out, crack and curl.

VINYL

Vinyl flooring is made from vinyl resins, plasticizers and color pigments. It is flexible but not as flexible as rubber and linoleum. Colors are bright and clear. It is resistant to harsh cleaners and grease and will not harden with age.

Unbacked Vinyl is available in smooth or waffle back, and is installed without adhesive. It is available in rolls 6 feet wide and many sizes of tiles. Thicknesses of smooth-backed vinyl are 5/64-inch, 3/32-inch and 1/8-inch, which is usual for homes. Waffle-back tiles are 1/4-inch thick. Unbacked vinyl is excellent in dent resistance and in underfoot comfort.

Backed Vinyl has a backing of felt, cork or degraded vinyl cemented to it. The usual thickness for homes is 3/32-inch and 5/64-inch. Backed vinyl resists denting by furniture almost as well as the unbacked vinyl.

Vinyl Asbestos tile has asbestos added to the formula. It has no backing. It is available only in 9 x 9-inch tiles. Thicknesses are 1/16-inch, 5/64-inch, 3/32-inch and 1/8-inch. Vinyl asbestos resists denting only fairly well. It is excellent in resisting grease and household alkalis and acids.

Rotogravure Vinyl has unusually clear patterns printed by the rotogravure (photographic) process in asphalt-saturated-felt backing with a protective surface of vinyl. It comes in standard rug sizes and by the yard in widths of 6, 9 and 12 feet. It is laid without adhesive. It is resistant to most household spills.

CARE OF SMOOTH FLOOR COVERINGS

Read and follow the directions for care and maintenance which the manufacturer of your floor covering recommends.

Go over your floors daily with a dry mop, broom or a vacuum cleaner. Wipe up spills as soon as possible. Between times when you give the floor a thorough cleaning and rewaxing, clean with a damp mop, using cold water. Warm water tends to soften the wax. Do not use an oil mop on a smooth surface floor. It will streak wax and injure rubber and asphalt tile.

Clean with a damp cloth after installation. Never wash until the adhesive is thoroughly set - 4 or 5 days after flooring material is laid.

Wax after the initial cleaning. Use water-base wax or solvent-base wax on cork, linoleum and vinyl. Use only water-base wax on asphalt or rubber tile. Never use solvent-base wax on asphalt or rubber tile for

the solvent (naphtha) softens and pits the material and causes colors to bleed.

Wash and wax when needed. Use a liquid floor cleaner recommended by the manufacturer in preference to soap or synthetic detergents. Strong soaps dry out asphalt, cork, linoleum and rubber, making them brittle, porous and hard to clean. Do not wax too heavily or too often. Two hard, thin coats of wax are better than one heavy coat. Be sure to remove old wax before rewaxing.

Do not apply varnish, lacquer, shellac or similar products. These cause materials to dry out, crack and curl.

SELECT THE WAX FOR THE JOB

Household waxes fall into two general groups:

Solvent-base wax

In a solvent-base wax the more solvent, the softer the product. Paste wax is the hardest, then cream wax and liquid wax. The solvent has an odor of naphtha or gasoline.

Paste wax is the old standby for wood floors and furniture that receive hard wear. It may be used on linoleum, vinyls and cork. Paste wax is the most economical but requires the most work to apply as each thin application must be buffed to a hard, dry finish.

For a thin, even coat, put the wax between layers of a cloth pad. Spread either by hand or with a long handled applicator. Allow to dry about 15 minutes, then polish. An electric polisher is much faster than buffing by hand. Try to rent an electric polisher if you do not have one. Cream and liquid waxes must also be buffed. Either of these waxes may be used as a combination cleaning agent and wax. The solvent loosens the dirt so that it can be picked up by the cloth pad used in applying the wax. Then buff the wax to a finish. As the cloth becomes dirty, the dirt should be folded in, leaving a clean area. If the floor is very dirty a second application of the cream or liquid wax will be helpful.

Water-base wax

Water-base wax is made up of minute particles of wax suspended in water. As the water evaporates, the wax particles are left in a thin layer on the surface and dry shiny. Spread this self-polishing wax evenly with a cloth or long handled applicator. Do not go over the surface more than once for an even glossy finish.