

# Tile & Grout Maintenance



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The first step in tile maintenance is sealing the tile and grout if necessary. Generally, glazed tile (and some unglazed tile) requires no sealer. To find out what type of tile you have, test it with a small amount of water. If the surface darkens from absorbing water, it needs to be sealed. Generally, cementitious grouts require sealing while specialty grouts like epoxy and furans do not.

## **Everyday cleaning**

Immediately wipe up spills and messes. Use pH-balanced cleaners and soapless detergents for daily cleaning. Agitate grout joints with a soft bristled brush to loosen debris. Thoroughly rinse, dry, and polish cleaned areas. Due to the tendency of acids to eat away the smaller aggregates first, leaving the larger stain-attracting aggregates in their place, acidic cleaners will eventually erode the grout in the joint, making cleaning and maintenance more and more problematic. This is especially true if using acidic cleaners on sanded grout installations.

## **Heavy duty cleaning**

Again, an attempt should be made to solve the cleaning problem with high-quality pH-balanced cleaners. These can include non-staining household scouring powders or poultices manufactured for this purpose. Be sure to agitate the cleaners again with a soft bristled brush to loosen stubborn grime. A good practice is to allow the cleaner to rest on the surface for a while to take advantage of the cleaner's maximum potential. If the results are not acceptable, high alkaline cleaners are the next step. These cleaners are recognized by their names like "heavy duty" or "deep clean."

On large areas, it is perfectly acceptable to use commercial buffing machines to clean tile and grout. The important consideration is the type of cleaner and a thorough rinse following the deep cleaning. If the results are not satisfactory using the PH-balanced cleaners, it may be necessary to use an acidic solution to solve a particular problem. Sulfamic and phosphoric acids are the safest and most common acids used in solving tile and grout cleaning problems. These two acids have very specific mixing and application recommendations that must be followed to the letter. Regardless, thoroughly rinse the cleaned area, dry, and polish.

## **Grout haze**

Grout haze is grout residue left on the tile face. Many times this haze can be cleaned off by simply using a scouring pad and water. The next progression would be a scouring cleanser or poultice and pad. The next step would be grout haze removal solution available from fine manufacturers. As a final step, an acid solution may be required.

Source: <http://www.thetiledoctor.com/maintenance/whitegrout.cfm>

### **Grout Sealing**

Always follow manufacturer's instructions on the specific sealer being used. Some sealers breathe naturally so a "still wet" installation can be allowed to dry out even after the sealer is applied. However, some sealers lock in the moisture as they lock out the stains, so make sure which type of sealer you are selecting and the proper technique of application. Your choices in grout sealers are a topical sealer that can offer a wet look or a penetrating sealer that has a natural look, which protects the grout but does not change the look of the grout. When sealing the grout there are various techniques to apply the sealer. Always follow the manufacturer's directions, but generally the best methods are to apply only to the grout joints and buff off any excess that happens to get on the tiles. Another method is to apply all over the surface with a sponge or cloth and then buff off the excess with a terry cloth or cheesecloth rag. Some sealers protect against everyday dirt and minor staining elements; others protect against harsh staining elements like hot grease. Look for warranties and protection information on the label from the manufacturers. Grouts can also be re-colored by applying topical coatings much like painting. There are special products made just for this technique and the best news is - they work! If you have damaged grout that is discolored, you can fix it.

Source: <http://www.thetiledoctor.com/maintenance/sealinggrout.cfm>

### **Tile Sealing**

Sealing of grout is almost always a good idea. The sealing of ceramic and stone tile must be evaluated on a case-to-case basis. Generally, if water will penetrate or darken the surface of ceramic or stone tile, so will staining materials. Be sure why you are sealing your tile, select the products carefully, and closely follow the manufacturer's instructions.

### **Stone**

The first step in stone tile maintenance is the sealing of the stone. Generally, all stone must be sealed. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for the product you choose. Knowing the surface preparation (polished, honed, or natural) coupled with the density and porosity of the stone will determine the best type (petroleum or water-based) of sealer to be used. The other consideration is that you use the best product the budget will allow.

### **Ceramic**

The first step in maintenance is the sealing of the tile (if necessary) and the grout (if necessary). Generally, glazed tile requires no sealer. Some unglazed tile requires no sealer. Know the type of tile you are installing. Test it with a small amount of water. If the surface darkens, it absorbs water and needs to be sealed. Generally, cementitious grouts require sealing while specialty grouts like epoxy and furans do not. If the grout darkens with water, it needs a sealer. Glazed tiles should never be sealed. The glaze is the "sealer" and is far more permanent and resistant to wear than any sealer. Many people seal tile that is installed indoors to protect against everyday dirt, stains and wear. When sealing tile indoors, a topical sealer is important in some types of softer tiles such as saltillo (topical produces a surface coat). When using a topical sealer, a "wear layer" or "sacrificial coating" of acrylic floor finish should be applied in addition to the sealer. This "wear layer" of acrylic floor finish will keep you from wearing through the sealer and having to strip and reseal the entire floor. Some manufacturers have sealers that incorporate a sacrificial coating together with a penetrating sealer. This can be the best of both worlds. However, it is critical that you maintain this wear layer.

On indoor installations of hard, dense tiles or stones, many people select a penetrating sealer only. This type of sealer leaves no topical finish and therefore does not require a "wear layer" coating, but will give lasting protection from everyday dirt and stains. Due to all the options available and their relations to each other, the use of sealers on tile is an area about which many books could be written. We speak only in very general terms, so please keep in mind that there are exceptions to every rule. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed closely after a sealer is selected. Please do not mix brands. Once you have started with one brand, do not apply another on top of the first, hoping for the proper results. When in doubt, always call the manufacturer for specific details. Retain the information on with whom you spoke. It is a good idea to have them fax you or email you the instructions to fall back on if there ever are any questions.

Source: <http://www.thetiledoctor.com/maintenance/sealingtile.cfm>