

LAY CARPET, VINYL OR CORK TILES

SKILL LEVEL



Only simple skills are needed to lay carpet, vinyl or cork tiles. Even where tiles have to be cut to fit awkward shapes, a simple cardboard pattern can be made first as a guide.

SAFETY FIRST

If adhesive has to be used to stick down tiles, ensure there is adequate ventilation in the room. When cutting tiles, use a sharp knife fitted with the correct blade for the material being laid.

INTRODUCTION

Floor tiles are very versatile - they can be used in any room in the house and make an excellent, hard wearing floorcovering.

Buy good-quality tiles and you will have a floorcovering that will withstand wear, tear and spillages. The beauty of carpet tiles is that if one is damaged or stained beyond repair, it can simply be picked up and replaced.

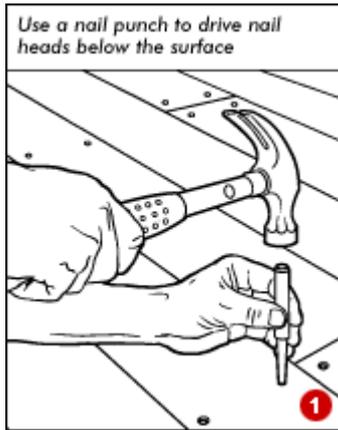
The performance of any floorcovering is determined by the care taken to prepare the sub-floor. Whether timber or concrete, it should be dry, clean and even. Where necessary, the sub-floor should be covered with hardboard.

2 - Calculating tiles needed

Tiles are sold in packs and the size and number of tiles contained in the pack will determine the area of floor that they will cover - usually stated in both metric and imperial measurements. If the area is given only in metric, then measure the room in metric or errors could occur in your calculations.

Measure the room and multiply the width by the length to find its total area. Any reveal or bay should be measured separately and its total area added to the main floor area. Round up the total to the nearest whole number to establish the number of packs of tiles you need to buy.

3 - Sub-floor preparation



If you have chipboard floors which are smooth and level, you can lay tiles directly on top. Remove any protruding tacks or nails or drive their heads below the surface using a hammer and nail punch (1); drive any screws just below the surface. Any loose boards should be refixed - use screws in upstairs rooms as hammering could damage the ceiling below.

Make sure that there are no wires or plumbing pipes where you are driving in nails or screws.

Floorboards will need to be covered with sheets of 3mm thick hardboard. If you lay tiles directly on to floorboards, it is likely that the boards will start to show through and cause premature wear, especially in areas of heavy traffic.

Use sheets 1220mm (4ft) square, or 1220mm x 610mm (4ft x 2ft).

Condition the boards to the room's atmosphere before laying them. This prevents them warping later. Brush water on to the mesh-side of the board, then stack the boards for 48 hours, mesh-side to mesh-side, in the room in which they are to be used.

Lay the boards smooth-side up. Use 19mm annular nails, hardboard nails or staples. Fix them every 150mm around the edges and across the boards. Butt up the edges of adjoining boards tightly, and stagger them in brickwork fashion so that joints don't coincide (2).

When cutting boards at skirtings, you do not need to get a perfect fit - a gap of around 6mm will be covered by the tile.

Any dampness in a solid floor must be treated before laying a floorcovering. There are various damp-proofing compounds that can be brushed on to cure the problem.



Holes or uneven patches can be filled with a self-levelling compound which is poured on the floor and spread out with

a trowel (3 & 4). It will then set to a level finish.

A concrete floor which gives off dust when brushed can be treated with a purpose-made sealer or with diluted PVA adhesive.

A new concrete floor must be allowed to dry out before laying tiles. Allow about one month for every inch of thickness.

If wood preservative has been applied to floorboards, don't lay tiles, even if the boards are covered with hardboard. There is a risk that the preservative could bleed through and ruin the tiles.

4 - Setting out the tiles

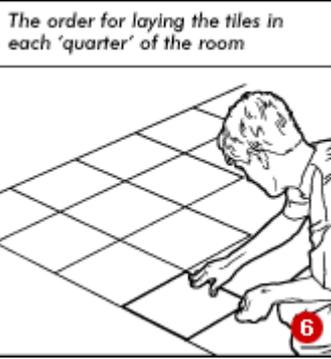


For the best appearance, establish how the tiles are to be set out beforehand. Avoid leaving narrow strips along skirtings and especially at a doorway (5).

First find the centre point of the room. Establish the centre point of opposite walls and snap a chalked stringline across in both directions.

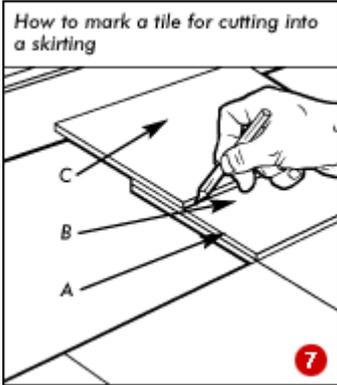
Working out to each wall, loose lay the tiles until the skirtings are reached. If narrow pieces are left, adjust the starting point to avoid this happening.

Any bays or window reveals will have to be taken into account and the starting point adjusted if necessary.



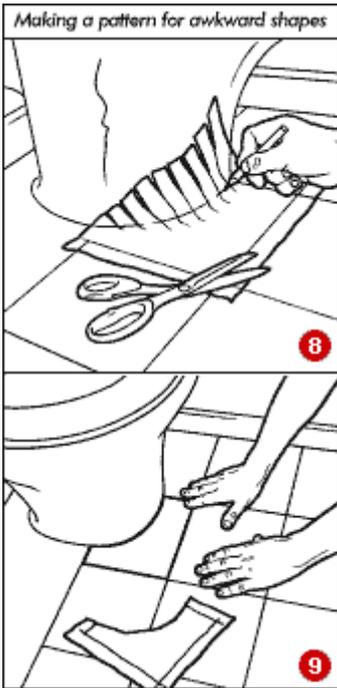
The best way to work is to lay the tiles in each quarter of the room formed by the string lines (6).

5 - Cutting tiles

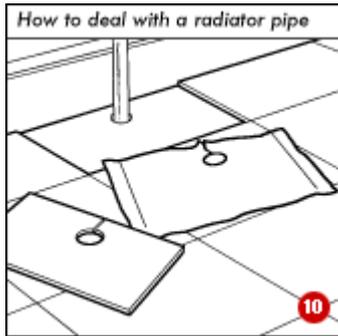


When cutting into a skirting (7), lay the tile to be cut (B) directly on to the last full tile in the row (A). Now place a third tile (C) on top and press its edge against the skirting. Using a pencil or biro, mark the other edge of tile C on to tile B.

Place the tile to be cut on a scrap piece of board and, using a sharp knife pressed against a steel straight-edge, cut firmly through the tile. It will fit perfectly into the space left for it.

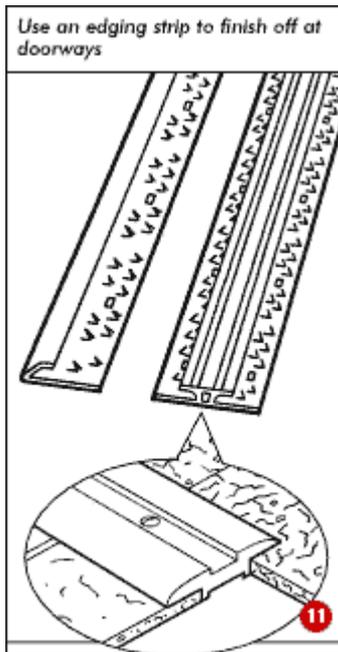


Awkward shapes around sink pedestals, door architraves etc, are best overcome by first making a cardboard pattern of the precise shape and transferring this to the tile (8 & 9).



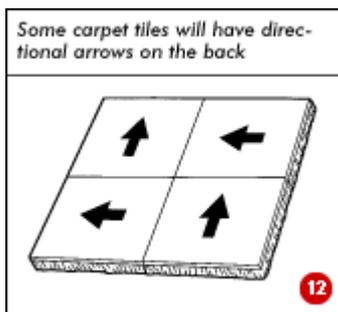
Where there is a radiator pipe, cut a slit from the back edge of the tile to the pipe position and then cut a circle out for the pipe. When the tile is laid, the slit will not be visible (10).

6 - Dealing with doorways



For a neat finish at a doorway, fix an edging strip centrally, using screws, adhesive or double-sided tape. There are various types of bar suitable for joining carpet or vinyl to carpet, vinyl, wood, ceramic or cork. Check that you are buying the correct type. Edges of floor-coverings not protected at doorways are likely to turn up, causing people to trip (11).

7 - Carpet tiles



Check the manufacturer's instructions for the correct way to lay the tiles - some have arrows on the back, which show the direction in which each tile is to be laid (12). It's important to follow the arrows as, with plain tiles, it is this which gives the 'chequerboard' effect.

Carpet tiles are loose-laid so that they can be taken up, if necessary, and relaid in different parts of the room to spread wear, or for cleaning. The first tile in the centre of the room can be dislodged slightly when the second and third tiles are laid. To prevent this, fix the first tile with carpet adhesive or double-sided carpet tape.

Butt up the edges of the tiles closely to neighbouring tiles.

8 - Self-adhesive vinyl tiles

Check that the batch and item numbers are the same on each pack.

Keep the tiles in warm conditions before laying them; this will ensure they are supple.

Vinyl tiles can be laid over old tiles which are well stuck down.

Use a suitable primer on hardboard or screeded floors before tiling.



Self-adhesive vinyl tiles have a paper backing to protect the adhesive (13). Do not remove this until the tile is to be laid.

Starting with the centre tile, peel off the paper and align the edges of the tile carefully with the guide lines. Press down the edges and then the remainder of the tile. If the tile is laid inaccurately, peel it off the floor immediately and relay it. The adhesive is sufficiently strong to allow for a second attempt.

If a tile is misaligned with the starting point, the error will be obvious at the skirting, where each edge tile will be tapered, giving a very poor appearance.

When laying subsequent tiles, butt up the edges, then roll out the tile flat on the floor, using hand pressure all over to ensure it has made good contact.

Go over the whole floor again at the end, pressing down all tiles to ensure they are well fixed.

Allow seven days before washing the floor with water.

9 - Cork tiles

Keep the tiles in their packs in a warm atmosphere, and only open the pack immediately before laying.

Shuffle each pack of tiles to blend the various differences there might be in the shade of each tile.

Where tiles are being laid with floor-tile adhesive, spread sufficient adhesive for the first tile, allowing about 10mm extra at each edge. After that, spread about one square metre at a time before laying further tiles. Use a V-notched spreader to apply the adhesive.

Any adhesive that comes up between the edges of the tiles should be wiped away immediately with a cloth dampened with either white spirit or water, according to the manufacturer's directions.

Check to see if you need to apply a coat of floor seal when all the tiles have been laid. Often the tiles are supplied with just one coat of sealer applied - a second may be needed to seal and waterproof the joints.