

CorkDecor™ and Select Line Cork Flooring Installation and Maintenance Instructions

Installing cork floors is simple but there are several things to consider in order to fully achieve successful, long lasting results. Be sure to understand all installation instructions **before** commencing. **Contact us** for technical assistance if unsure of installation procedures.

Both the CorkDecor™ and Select Line of cork flooring are installed by gluing the tiles to the subfloor. While these glue down cork floors are easy to install, **correct adhesive type and proper subfloor preparations are critical** to ultimate installation satisfaction.

Moisture precautions: Cork floors should never be installed over any areas where there is any indication of moisture beneath subfloors. Moisture problems are especially common in basements or on freshly poured concrete or leveling compounds not completely cured. It is the responsibility of the installer to test for any signs of moisture. All subfloor moisture and moisture problems must be permanently eliminated prior to installation.

Surface moisture resulting from spills usually in kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms are not a concern provided the cork tiles are correctly sealed with polyurethane (see below). As on any other flooring material, surface spills on cork floors simply need to be wiped up as soon as possible.

Subfloor Preparation

CorkDecor™ and Select Line tiles can be installed over most existing floor surfaces provided those surfaces are completely smooth, structurally sound, level and clean. Subfloors (whether new or existing) must be free of dirt, grease, wax, or anything else that would hinder a good adhesive bond. It will be necessary to fill in any cracks, joints, ruts, grooves, seams, or any rough surfaces in existing floors using wood fillers or leveling compounds and then sand smooth to insure uniformity. **This must be done to prevent imperfections on subfloor surfaces from “telegraphing” through the cork tiles after installation.** Ask your home center or installer for correct fill type depending on subfloor type or **contact us** for additional details.

Provided the existing floor to be covered with cork is firmly in place, cork tiles can generally be installed over cement, plywood, vinyl, wood, ceramic, linoleum, stone, any other hard surface

If installing on existing vinyl, linoleum or other smooth surfaces, these smooth surfaces need to be roughed up (and completely cleaned) to insure a firm bond. Seams along wood floors and grouted areas (ceramic and stone floors) must be filled and leveled making the floor completely flat and level.

Installing a new subfloor

If the existing floors are in poor condition it is often easier and more economical to install a new subfloor over the existing floor rather than to repair and prepare the existing floor. The easiest method is by installing a quality sanded plywood over the existing floor. Existing floors may be covered with 3/8” or 1/2” plywood sanded on one side (sanded side up) and securely anchored to the existing floor. (If thinner subfloor is desired, the minimum thickness should be 1/4”). The 4’x4’ poplar underlayment sheets

available at home centers could be used.) If a thicker subfloor is needed, fir plywood, sanded on one side, is recommended (sanded side up). The joints on the plywood should be staggered. Screw holes (counter sunk) and seams need to be patched with a filler. Once the filler dries, it is extremely important to sand the filler areas smooth (as well as any other rough areas on the subfloor). The smoother the better, and the less chance of imperfections “telegraphing” through installed cork tiles. After sanding, the whole area must be vacuumed completely free of dust in order for the adhesive to adhere properly.

Hint: A damp rag may be used to ‘tack’ the area even after vacuuming.

Pre-Installation

Cork tiles should be placed in the room(s) of installation at least 72 hours before the installation begins to allow for acclimatization. At this time also check that tiles are the chosen desired pattern, color, and shading and inspect tiles for possible imperfections. To avoid surprises or disappointments, closely review and understand the Facts About The [Natural Characteristics of Cork](#). Because cork is a natural product, there will be color and shade variations from tile to tile which add to the uniqueness and natural beauty of cork flooring. The blending of shades and/or colors is the installer’s responsibility.

Depending on the tile chosen certain patterns can be created. Lay out the tiles creating desired pattern (staggered seams is usually recommended). Now is the time to mark any lines on the subfloor that will be used as guides for installing the cork tiles.

Hint: since most rooms are never completely squared it is usually best to start installation from door openings laying tiles into the room.

Cork Tile Installation

The following are tools typically used for CorkDecor™ and Select Line cork floor installations:

- Utility knife with extra blades
- Metal straight edge
- Cutting board
- Chalk Line
- Contact Cement
- Paint rollers and pan
- J-Roller

Cut all door jambs so that the cork tiles will fit neatly beneath them. This can be done using a handsaw and a cork tile as a thickness guide. Always vacuum after any cutting as any debris on the subfloor will cause bumps in the installed tiles if left beneath them.

Recommended Adhesive

Use a “**water based contact cement**” for the installation of the CorkDecor™ and Select Line cork tiles. Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions as shown on the adhesive containers.

Hint: It is recommended that one or two tiles are tested in a low visibility area prior to installing the complete floor. This will insure that the subfloor and adhesive are compatible. This will also allow the installer to understand how the contact adhesive works with cork tiles.

Important hint: The contact cement must be applied to both the subfloor and the back of the cork tile and left until fully dry to the touch.

The quickest application method is to use a paint roller and pan. It is important to feather out the edges of the contact cement so that it does not form humps or bumps once it has dried. These could show up as imperfections once the tiles are installed.

Once the contact cement has dried completely on both surfaces, the cork tiles are ready to be installed.

Hint: Larger rooms can be prepared one section at a time (20 to 30 square feet or more at a time ... apply adhesive to 20 to 30 square feet of subfloor and equal amount of tiles). Smaller areas such as bathrooms can be completely prepared at one time. Once applied and dried, the adhesive will remain functional for more than 24 hours so there is no need to rush.

Contact cement is a powerful adhesive so it is important to be sure of tile placement prior to pressing tiles into place. Once pressure is applied between the cork tile and the subfloor, it becomes difficult to move or remove the tile if it is not placed in the correct spot the first time. After the tile is hand pressed into place, use a J-Roller to roll each tile individually as it is installed. Once all the tiles are installed to insure full adhesion use a 100 pound roller over all of the tiles.

Hint: To clean excess or spilled adhesive from tiles use a damp cloth if the adhesive is still wet or mineral spirits if the adhesive is dry.

Expansion gap: It is **important to maintain a 1/4" gap** along the edges of all walls, cabinets, adjoining floors, etc. This will allow space for the floor to contract and expand with changes in heat and humidity. Once the floor is installed this expansion gap will be hidden by moldings or transition strips.

When cork tiles require cutting, measure tiles carefully and cut cleanly using a sharp utility knife and metal straight edge.

Hint: Areas requiring tiles to be cut (along wall edges, cabinets, toilets, tubs, etc) can be done after the rest of the floor is installed.

Hint: To measure the cut, place the tile that needs to be cut up against the wall (or cabinet, counter, etc) but overlapping the last row already installed. Remember to maintain the 1/4" expansion gap along the wall. Mark tile where it needs to be cut.

Hint: Remember that each cut tile edge will be hidden, either under trim at room edges or under transition strips. These cuts, therefore, do not need to be perfectly straight.

Hint: For rounded corners or shapes it is also possible to cut tiles with large, sharp scissors or metal cutters. If cuts will be exposed (not covered by trim, molding, or transition strips) tile edges should be sanded smooth.

Hint: Once tiles are installed the floor can be walked on right away but if possible allow 24 hours before furniture placement.

Once all the tiles are installed, install 3/4" x 3/4" quarter round along the existing baseboard to hide the 1/4" gap left to allow for proper expansion and contraction. All transition strips can now be installed as well.

Consideration of Various Rooms

Kitchens:

It is standard practice to install glue down cork flooring before new cabinets are installed. The new cabinets will have no effect on the glue down flooring. If cabinets are already in place simply install cork flooring to the edge of the cabinets.

Appliances should be placed on Teflon (or other hard material) sheets so they will not mark or “sink” into the floor. To eliminate marking the floor, additional sheets should be used as gliders when moving or sliding appliances. **Never** slide or move appliances over cork floors without glider sheets underneath.

The cork tiles beneath dishwashers need only be placed under the front feet and the rest of the appliance is leveled accordingly.

Hint: Although most CorkDecor™ and Select Line floors are prefinished with three coats of polyurethane, it is recommended that an extra coat of polyurethane is added after installation to **help seal the seams from surface moisture spills**. Professional application is suggested. If the floor has been used and is no longer completely new, a degreasing agent needs to be buffed into the floor prior to any additional polyurethane applications. Always check for compatibility between the existing floor and new polyurethane prior to recoating. [Contact us](#) if unsure.

Bathrooms:

The same rules apply to bathrooms as kitchens. The main difference is the toilet. Always remove the toilet and install the cork flooring up to the flange. When re-installing the toilet it will sit up higher from the original base by the thickness of the new flooring. It may therefore be necessary to either install two wax rings, one on top of the other, or obtain an extender kit. It is also recommended to change the supply line to the tank at this time.

Offices:

If rolling chairs are used at desks, place plastic protective floor mats under chairs. Be sure to use mats that do not have the pointed nubs on the bottom.

Polyurethane Surface or Unfinished Surface

Most of the CorkDecor™ and Select Line of cork tiles are available with a prefinished polyurethane surface or an unfinished surface. If the unfinished tiles are chosen, it is recommended that a minimum of three coats of water based polyurethane be applied after installation. The unfinished tiles can also be stained but it is essential to make sure the stain and urethane are compatible prior to coating.

Hint: As stated above, it is recommended that an extra coat of polyurethane be applied even to cork tiles with prefinished polyurethane surfaces once floors are installed in bathrooms, kitchens, or laundry rooms. This will protect the floors from surface spills and will not allow moisture to penetrate beneath the cork flooring.

Maintenance

No harsh detergents containing any vinegars, pastes, or waxes should be used. A damp cloth is sufficient to clean and wipe floors. Do not use excessive water. As with other flooring types, vacuuming cork floors regularly is also recommended. Do not use flooring waxes on cork floors with polyurethane surfaces.

Any heavy furniture or chairs should have felt pads placed on the feet. Heavier objects such as pianos and pool tables may require larger pads under the feet. This will help reduce denting of the floor.

Hint: Dents in cork floors caused by heavy furniture will usually recover up to 90% over time once furniture has been removed.

If heavy items are on wheels (pianos, big screen TV's etc) they should not be rolled directly on the cork. Always put a piece of plywood with a packing quilt underneath to move these objects.

Repairing Damaged Tiles:

Damaged tiles are easy to replace. Using a stiff scraper and a mallet, scrape the tile out of its place, being very careful not to damage neighboring tiles. It is crucial to clean any debris from the area. This is usually accomplished by using sand paper. If any filler has come up with the tile, it will need to be repaired and sanded smooth just as in the installation steps described above. Once the area is clean, simply re-apply water based contact cement to the area and to the replacement tile, and once the adhesive is dry to the touch, press replacement tile firmly into place.