HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

VINYL FLOOR TILE

Installing vinyl floor tile is a home repair just about anyone can do. It's manageable because you're only working with one 12"-square piece of flooring at a time – so, if you make a mistake, you only lose a dollar or two.

CHOOSING TILE

Vinyl floor tile comes in two basic types, and both types can be purchased in either residential or commercial grade.

TYPE / GRADE	DESCRIPTION
Surface design	The surface coating or design is bonded to another layer to form the tile.
Through-color	The design and colors go all the way through the thickness of the tile. This second type is more durable and long-lasting, especially under kitchen chair legs.
Residential grade	Usually 1/16" thick.
Commercial grade	Usually 1/8" thick. Although commercial tile is more expensive (but less than twice the price of residential), the extra cost is well worth it. Commercial grade tile looks smoother and more even when installed, and it will last much longer.

HOW MUCH TILE?

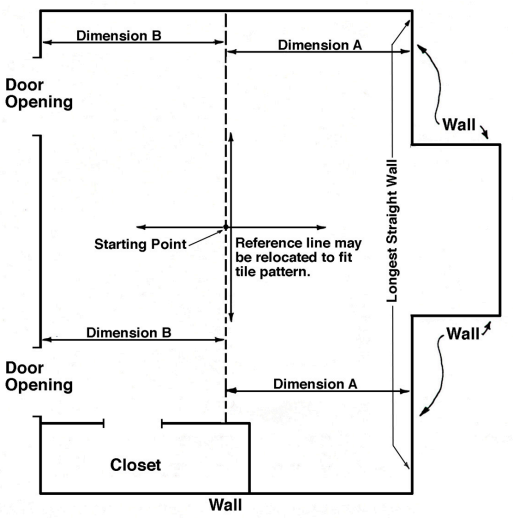
To determine the amount of tile you'll need, measure your room. Then, multiply the overall length by the overall width, to get your approximate square footage. Measure stairs, landings, closets, and other areas separately, and add to the total. Tile is usually sold in boxes; check the label for the square footage each box will cover.

PREPARING THE FLOOR

After you choose your tile, you'll need to prepare the floor upon which you'll be installing it. Make sure the underlayment is solid, and that you have filled any cracks or depressions with crack filler and sanded them smooth. (See our "Floor Underlayment" handout for how-to instructions.)

LAYING OUT THE ROOM

1. **Find the center.** Start your installation by locating the center point of the room. (If your room is irregularly shaped, you'll have to decide how to roughly square it off to locate a center point.) Along each of the four sides, measure to find the center, and make a mark there. Snap a chalk line between the center points of opposite walls. The two lines will cross at the center of the room.
2. **Dry-lay a row each way.** From this center point, lay out a row of tiles in each direction, placing the pieces down with their edges touching but without sticking them to the floor. Extend the rows all the way out to the walls.
3. **Balance the border tiles.** You want to end up with the last piece of tile at each wall being the same size as the piece at the opposite wall. If your rows don't end up that way, adjust your starting point one way or the other until the edge tiles (or “border tiles”) will be of approximately even size at all the walls.
4. **Snap working lines.** Snap a second set of lines from your new starting point; these are the lines you will work from (see diagram).



Establishing the starting point and reference lines

INSTALLING THE TILE

With the new lines established, you can start installing the tile. Lay the pieces right along the lines you have marked. If you are using self-adhesive tile, simply peel the paper from the back of each piece and press it into place along the line, pushing it tightly against the tiles next to it. Radiate out from the center in all four directions, rather than installing one row at a time. Tile that is not self-adhesive is installed in much the same way, except that you first apply adhesive to the area you are working. (Follow the application procedures described on the adhesive can.)

WATCH THE ARROWS

Some tile will have an arrow printed on the back of each piece to indicate the direction the tile should face. You can orient this arrow any direction you wish, so long as you are consistent after you start.

BORDER TILES

When you've finished all the uncut tiles, you're ready to install the border tiles. Measure the space between the last full tile and the wall, and cut a piece of tile to fit. (Since rooms are seldom perfectly square, measure for each tile—don't assume all tiles will be the same size.) A sharp utility knife or a paper cutter works well to cut the tiles. To allow for easier cutting, make sure the tiles are at room temperature. If you have to cut a tile to an unusual shape, you can make a paper pattern and cut around it.

DOORWAYS

At doorways, undercut the door frame by laying a hand saw flat on top of a tile and sawing out a portion of the frame at the floor. This opening will allow you to slip the tile slightly underneath the frame, giving you a neater finished look.

FINISHING UP

Once all the tile has been installed, run a linoleum roller over the flooring to bond it well to the underlayment. (You can rent a roller for about $15 to $20.) This finishing step is frequently skipped, but it does make the job look better and last longer. With the floor rolled, replace any baseboard trim. Then, after the floor has set overnight, you can move back in.

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

WWW.HRRC-CH.ORG | +1.216.381.6100 | 2520 Noble Road, Cleveland Heights, OH 44121 |
© 2026, Home Repair Resource Center