

Maintenance of Granite and Other Natural Stone Countertops

Natural stone countertops can be a pretty big investment to a kitchen's architecture. This investment can be protected by keeping it well-maintained and following a few simple guidelines in cleaning.

Generally speaking, natural stone is a porous material and will absorb moisture. Granite, while being one of the hardest surface for countertops will absorb more moisture than some softer stone such as soapstone. Because of this, it is important to seal most natural stone. A general rule of thumb is to seal it every 6 to 12 months, but each stone countertop fabricator will have its own guidelines and should be asked about this. Soapstone, for instance, may need no or little sealing, while marble may require sealing more often. A good sealant will typically add years to countertop's lifetime, help prevent stains, help keep the surface from dulling and assist in providing a safe, bacteria-free zone for food preparation. Sealant provides a clean nonporous top surface over the granite, while use of something called an impregnator will fill the gaps below the surface, often producing less discoloration. Sealants do not necessarily eliminate the possibility of staining, but generally provide a longer time to clean up potential stain-causing issues before stains set in.

Soapstone countertops are very resistant to chemical reactions so choice of cleanser is not as critical. But some granite, depending on its exact composition, and all marble is vulnerable in this area, so cleaning solutions should be as close to neutral as possible with a pH of 7 being ideal. Acids, even those from citrus fruit juices can scar certain minerals in natural stone, leaving dull spots called etching. Specialty granite cleaners are available to make the work easy, but to avoid the high cost of these cleaners, alternatives can be used.

A daily wipe down with warm water and mild dish detergent is both good preventative maintenance and satisfactory for most cleanups. Juices and wines, if left too long on the surface can stain. Without the sealant, and sometimes with, these stains can become permanent if left too long. If a natural stone is stained, sometimes a specialist in removing these stains can be called in, but there is no guarantee that even someone specialized can remove a given stain.

Granite and soapstone countertops are completely heat resistant for all kitchen purposes. Soapstone is common building material in fireplaces and both it and granite can take temperatures up to 1,200 degrees F. Even at that temperature, the heat will typically not destroy the countertop, but excessive heat can mar the polish and bring the sheen down. If no trivets or other insulation is available, it is recommended to let pans air cool for a minute before being set directly on the surface.

Granite is famous for its hardness. On the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, granite is a 7. In comparison, diamond is a 10 and stainless steel is 6, so cutting and scratching are typically not a problem. That being said, granite can be scratched and scratches in granite are very difficult to repair. Marble and soapstone, however, are not so impervious to cuts and scratches and a cutting board will always be required. Darker materials will generally show scratches much easier, whereas lighter materials will show stains easier. With natural stone, chipping is also possible. In addition, marble can crack easily from hard blows and soapstone is known to dent.



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