

# Features of Granite and Other Natural Stone Countertops

Natural stone is highly regarded as one of the most sought after surfaces for kitchen countertops. The beauty and unique qualities of each slab can be breathtaking and granite can stay intact and polished for generations. Even though natural stone typically has a price tag to match its brilliance and durability (although that has come down significantly in recent years), there is considerable maintenance with this surface choice.

Granite is the most popular and effective stone for countertops with soapstone and marble following. Although granite is one of the hardest types of stone known, it also can be very porous. Microscopic fissures can trap liquid, leading to staining, etching and bacterial growth. Because of this, most natural stone will need to be sealed every 6 to 12 months to either impregnate the pores or provide a top coat over the stone. Some stones need sealed more often, such as white marble, while other stones may not need sealed at all, such as some soapstone.

Granite and soapstone are highly heat resistant at practical temperatures of up 480 degrees F. Even so, direct placement of hot pans on the surface is discouraged because repeated contact can lead to cracking down the road.

Because of its hardness, granite is scratch resistant to all but the most deliberate of cuts. However, it has been noted by some that darker granite can be left with visible scratches. Marble and soapstone are do not fare so well in scratch resistance. They are softer stones and susceptible to cuts, scratches, abrasions, denting and cracking. And, all natural stone can be chipped.

Natural stone, with the limited exception of most soapstone, is typically susceptible to chemicals, especially acids, and even relatively weak ones, such as those as produced by citrus fruits can dull and etch the polish. Cleaners should be as close to pH 7 as possible.

A variety of edging, corner treatments and backsplash styles can be accommodated by natural stone. The most popular edging is straight, rounded, bullnose, slanting and ogee. Custom edging can also be done, but may affect the price dramatically.

The variety of colors, grains and the uniqueness of each slab is a double-edged sword. Granite comes in browns, beiges, whites, blacks, grays, blues, reds, greens, purples and more. It is almost impossible to match an exact color from a magazine or sample cards. Depending on the importance of exact color matching, a trip to the distributor will be required. This variety and uniqueness serves to individualize each countertop and at the same time, it makes it extremely difficult for any future additions to match perfectly to the existing countertop.

The price of natural stone holds many buyers at bay. It is among the most expensive kitchen surface. While thinner slabs can be less, the price range of natural stone starts at about two to four times that of less expensive options, such as laminate or tile, and high end custom designs can be very pricey. Prices (and quality) will vary greatly from fabricator to fabricator and from different regions of the country.



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