

Maintenance and Cleaning of Tile Countertops

Tile countertops, while great for their aesthetic appearance and affordability are generally a more high-maintenance surfacing option. Whether ceramic, porcelain or stone, tile requires regular cleaning and drying to keep them looking their best and to ward off bacteria and mildew that can grow and accumulate in the grout. Mildew and other molds are not only unsanitary, but will also cause discoloration of the countertop.

After installation, when still new, the grout in a tile countertop is not fully cured and regular cleaning is required even when not in use. Dirt and dust can collect in the still-soft grout that can be next to impossible to remove if left in place. For basic, every day cleaning, a mild detergent or cleaner such as Windex is suitable. The use of a soft sponge is ideal, although a rougher sponge or nylon-bristled brush can be used for stubborn or dried stains.

The surface of the tile and the grout can both be cleaned with the soft sponge, and acid-based cleaners should be avoided because they can cause fast fading of the colors and can permanently damage colored grout. The grout can be cleaned with a foam or spray grout cleaner or a little bleach to remove mildew. For those who prefer not to use chemical cleaners, a little baking soda mixed with vinegar directly on the grout makes an excellent cleaning solution. It can then be gently scrubbed with a tooth brush.

Water left on the tile countertop can stain ceramic and porcelain tile. It will also cause bacterial growth and mildew in the grout. Silicone caulking used on the backsplash and sink will help to resist mildew in these areas. After cleaning, the countertop can be dried and buffed with a towel. In most cases, no further polishing is needed and waxes should not be used as they can be difficult to remove later.

Stone tile and unglazed ceramic will need a sealer to keep the damaging effects of moisture at bay. It is not required for glazed ceramic and porcelain. Reapplication of sealant is recommended every 6 – 12 months and is indispensable with granite or unglazed tiles.

Most tiles are relatively thin and they will crack with a heavy enough impact. The only saving grace is that it is possible to replace an individual tile without too much trouble. The real problem is finding an exact match for the pattern and colors of your existing tile. If asked, many countertop fabricators will leave behind a few tiles in case they are needed to repair damage in the future.

Heat is also not a problem for most tile, which tolerates relatively high temperatures well, but some scorching can occur given a high enough temperature or a direct fire as from a cigarette. As always, a trivet or other insulation is recommended to be used with all hot pots and pans.



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