

Step 1: Preparing Your Floors for Vinyl Tiles

Vinyl tile can be installed over virtually any underlying surface - sheet vinyl, existing vinyl tile or even concrete - as long as it's in good repair. Cracks, bumps and dips will need to be repaired before you install your tile.

Remove any trim around the floor edges, and if you're doing a bathroom, you're best off removing the toilet. Bring your new tiles into your home a day or two before you begin installing so they can get acclimatized to your home.

Existing vinyl floors: If the floor has some dents or dips or even a strong pattern, you are well advised to apply a leveler/primer layer. Simply spread this compound smoothly with a wide bladed putty knife or a straight edged trowel. It will give you a smooth surface for your tiles and also prevent the underlying flooring from "burning through" and becoming noticeable under your new tiles.

Concrete floors: Patch any holes or cracks and remove any bumps or ridges using a cold chisel or heavy grit sandpaper on a belt sander. A quick sanding of the whole concrete floor will also help the tiles adhere to the surface, particularly if the floor has been painted.

Step 2: Laying Out Your Tiles

You want to lay out vinyl tiles with the pattern centered on the most noticeable part of the floor. Following this concept, you use whole tiles in the center of the floor and work your way out to the edges where cut tiles won't be as noticeable.

Start your layout by measuring to find the center point of two opposite walls and snap a chalk line between these two points. Then, measure to find the center points of the remaining walls and snap another chalk line between these two points. You will have divided your room into quadrants. Use a carpenter's square to be sure that your lines cross at 90° and adjust them if they are off.

Starting at the intersection of the two chalk lines, dry fit a row of tiles the length and width of the room to determine how they will actually fit when they reach the wall. You want the rows right against the walls to be at least a half tile wide and approximately the same width on both sides of the room. If your tiles don't end up with the proper spacing, adjust your center reference lines so they will.

Once you're happy with your center reference lines and the resulting layout, you can actually begin installing the tiles. Start where your reference lines cross and lay the first tile beside where the lines cross. Then using the lines as a guide, work your way out to the walls. Press each tile firmly in place, and after you have installed a few rows, use a tile roller to bond them firmly in place. Install all the whole tiles before starting to work around the edges.

Step 3: Cutting Tiles

You can cut straight edges in vinyl tiles using a sharp utility knife. For curves or irregular shapes, aviation or tin snips will do the job.

Cutting an edge tile to width is easy if you lay the tile to be cut on top of the last row of full tiles. Now, place another full tile up against the wall so it overlaps the loose tile. Using the second loose tile as a template, mark the first loose tile. Cut along the mark and you will have an exact fit to go against the wall.

Irregular shapes or cut outs for plumbing pipes are best handled by making a cardboard template and then using that as your guide for cutting.

Step 4: Finishing Up

After you've installed your floor, reinstall your moldings to cover the small gaps at the edges and give it a quick sweep to remove any dirt or debris from your installation. You can walk on it now, but you're well advised to let the glue set up for a few days before you wash the floor.