

LAMINATE



THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LAMINATE FLOORING

Selecting a floor can be very confusing with all the new products coming into the marketplace today. We will attempt to help clear up the many faces of laminate flooring. Rather than discuss the technical differences between laminate brands (like Pergo, Wilsonart, Formica) we will focus on the general applicability of laminate floors for a specific area of your home.

We generally describe laminate flooring to our customers as follows: Laminate floors have the look of hardwood or stone with the ease of maintenance of a vinyl floor. A laminate product has basically 3 primary components to its make-up. They are the surface wear layer (top), core material (middle) and the balancing layer (bottom). The various qualities of these above listed material will dictate the price of your floor. You can think of a laminate floor as a product that is 20 times harder than your kitchen countertop. This floor will resist high heel indentations, crayons, tar and shoe polish. It will never need refinishing.

Almost all laminate floors come with a 15-year triple warranty against staining, wearing and fading. Some manufacturers are now adding a water warranty, which in some cases is just an extension to your homeowner's policy. See specific warranties if this is going to be a major concern in the room you are re-doing.

Construction: There are two distinct manufacturing methods: high-pressure and direct pressure lamination. With High-pressure lamination, the bottom and top layers are separately heated and pressurized into a laminate structure. These layers are then fused to the core under heat and pressure. This is a much more expensive process and adds strength to the overall product.

Direct-pressure lamination is where the layers are assembled all at once then filled with hardening melamine resins using heat and pressure. High-pressure lamination, the original method, is more impact- and dent-resistant while direct-pressure laminates are more economical and offer very good quality overall.

Wear layer: The surface wear layer is typically made of aluminum oxide. The pattern of the flooring is a photograph applied to a melamine laminate. Since you can photograph literally anything, the patterns for laminate flooring are endless. The most common patterns are woods and stones. The aluminum oxide gives it incredible strength against most scratches. The melamine keeps the floor from staining and discoloring from direct sunlight.

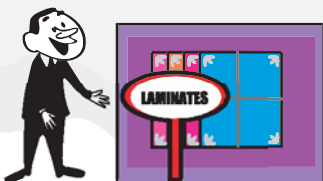
Center core: The center core should always be made of a smooth high-density fiberboard, particleboard or plastic. The core adds impact resistance and forms the tongue and groove locking system. Some manufacturers, to improve moisture resistance of the core, also impregnate melamine plastic resins in the core. Melamine is a plastic-like resin used throughout the construction process to add durability, and stability to laminated planks and tiles.

Backings: The backing board varies depending on the manufacturers discretion- but it ranges from a paper layer to a full plastic laminate layer. The backing is constructed of a heavy layer of melamine foil. The backing is primarily used as a balancing agent to stabilize the board in order to stop cupping and bowing. In addition, it also has water resistance qualities. Dimensional stability is much greater with a solid laminate backing than it could ever be with just paper. Those with laminate backing provide better protection against potential water damage than those with paper backings.

Why Laminate?

There are many reasons to choose a laminate floor for your home. We will attempt to list the most important features of all laminate floors and later address each specific product's advantage.

-Laminate floors can go directly over most existing floors except carpeting. Because you do not need to buy expensive sub-flooring you are saving hundreds of dollars versus putting in a vinyl or ceramic tile floor. The floor must not vary more than 3/16 of an inch over 10ft to properly install laminate flooring over your current flooring. You may be able to correct this problem with a self-leveling product. See a Custom Carpet Center's representative for more information on this product.



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-There are no dye lots to worry about which means adding on to a room is easy. Please remember if the manufacturer stops making the color of your floor you will not be able to continue the original color throughout your home. Asking for 8-10% more material will allow you to be left with a safe amount in case you need to do a repair or add on to your job.

-Ease of maintenance. You need only to damp mop or lightly vacuum with an occasional application of the recommended floor cleaner. You never have to wax or strip a laminate floor.

-Natural wood beauty: Laminate floors allow the most realistic reproduction of some rare or extinct wood and stone patterns.

Wear and stain resistance: The melamine surface gets its incredible durability from the aluminum oxide. Second only to diamonds in hardness, aluminum oxide provides unsurpassed wear and stain protection. Spills such as juice, wine, grease and chocolate are easily wiped away. Cigarette burns; asphalt stains, shoe polish, paint, computer ink, crayon and nail polish come clean with alcohol or nail polish remover. Candle wax and glue can be easily scraped away with a plastic paint scraper.

Maybe the best feature is the ability to repair most damage quickly and affordably. If you scratch or damage a few boards a skilled mechanic can pop out those damaged boards and replace them with new boards that are guaranteed to match exactly to your original floor. It is important to have a minimum of 5-7 full boards left over after your installation in case the color is discontinued.

-These floors are much harder and dent resistant than a traditional hardwood floor.

-One of the easiest floors to install. If you can run a circular saw and have some fundamental carpentry skills, you can install this type of flooring. Professional installation is also recommended and available at any of Custom Carpet Centers 8 WNY showrooms. Be sure to read up on the particular product you choose because installation methods vary greatly from supplier to supplier. Directions are included in every box, but doing your homework before the project will save you countless hours later.

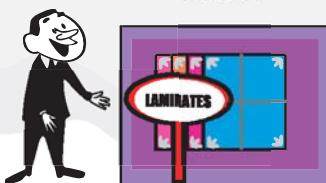
Acclimation: Is strongly recommended but not always practical. Acclimating or placing the product directly in the room for 48 hours before the installation will make the material easier to work with during the install. At Custom Carpet Centers we keep our floors in a controlled heated section of our warehouse to avoid the peaks and valleys associated with installing a floor that has been left in a cold truck prior to installation. A do-it yourselfer is going to want to pick up the product and let the floor acclimate.

Where can I put this floor?

The first thing you must check is the evenness of your floor. It must be very flat and not vary more than 3/16 of an inch over 10 feet or a laminate product will not perform as stated in each manufacturer's warranty. Now that you have a basic idea that laminate flooring is neither hardwood nor vinyl, it's time to discuss where you can install this product. The answer varies between manufacturers, but 100% of floor makers agree that their floors can go in all areas in a home excluding wet areas. If you are installing a laminate floor in a bath or a laundry room, you must take special precautions to prepare the area. This means caulking all edges and selecting a water resistant product. Most bathrooms are going to do fine for a laminate floor if you avoid installing it in extreme conditions such as a poorly ventilated room where moisture cannot escape. Topical spills from splashing or spills will not cause damage unless they are left unattended. It is the water from underneath or around the edges that is the real culprit. Radiant floors are another area where you can confidently install a laminate floor. They can be installed over hot water pipe systems or electric heat elements, which can be too drying for other flooring types. Make sure to dry out the concrete before installation. Then lay a vapor barrier over it even if it passes the moisture test mentioned earlier. Next, put underlayment on top of the vapor barrier and lay the flooring on top of that.

It is imperative to have a level, clean, smooth and dry sub floor surface. Even a small spot of dirt/debris can cause the laminate to crack over time. "Level" usually means a slope of less than 3/16 inch over a distance of 10 feet. "Smooth" usually means that grooves or bumps on the sub floor are less than 1/8 inch high or deep. If you're not sure, you can speak to a Custom Carpet Centers' representative to arrange a moisture test for the area that you want to cover or read further on in this section to learn about a moisture test you can do on your own to ensure a moisture safe final job.

Glue vs. Glue-less? Most manufacturers are offering a glue-less product as an option to a more complicated and messy fully glued floor. We have listed a few benefits of each of these recognized installation systems.



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Glued method: The actual laminate floor is adhered together by gluing the tongue and groove edges together and finishing the perimeter of the room with wall base or quarter round. All flooring should be installed with a manufacturer's specified glue that should never be substituted with any other glue. Carefully read gluing directions and test a few boards out prior to attempting the installation of the first row of boards. Getting the first two rows square is a must to ensure a successful install. This floor was popular in the mid to late 90's because it gave customers a sense of confidence that the floor would be more waterproofed with glue (this is true). It also gave people the feeling of confidence knowing that the boards had glue holding them together rather than just being snapped into place.

Click or snap together also known as a glue less product: This is a locking floor that can be assemble and taken apart a number of times. The long joint clicks together by inserting the tongue at a slant into the channel of the groove. Reversibility allows you to take the floor apart during the installation without damaging it. The advantages of the click together floor system are ease of installation, potential portability (you could take the floor apart if you wanted to), speed of installation, (glue less installation can be 20-30% quicker) and an overall neater finished job with less cleanup (no glue or moisture residue).

How to pick a floor that's right for you!

Most people will start with choosing a color and then research the many options in manufacturers. At last count there were 35 suppliers making a wide variety of laminate products from snap to click to glue. The thickness and construction weigh heavily in determining how well a floor will perform. Let's review what dictates the price and the quality of a laminate floor.

Color and Design: The more color variation, the amount of embossing to the pattern and screening will add value to your floor. Compare finishes between suppliers to pick the floor that looks the most realistic to you. You will notice the less expensive floors tend to have a little bit more of a plastic look to them as opposed to the better grades which mimic real wood.

Warranty: These range from one year to a lifetime. These warranties can cover very little or almost anything you can think of wanting covered. Carefully read the warranties of the floors you are considering and, when you find a product that you, like apply how their warranty fits your family's needs. Water warranties on the most part backup your homeowner's policy.

Ease of installation: The snap or click together floors are much quicker to install than fully glued floors. The lack of glue means there is no film to wipe off the top of the floor. When installing a glued down floor, it is best to wipe the floor as you go and do not allow the film to sit for longer than 15 minutes. Most laminate floors can go in rooms that are 65 degrees or higher at the time of the install. It is not necessary to have permanent heat once the final installation has been completed. This is true of most floors, but it is always best to check each warranty before installing a particular floor. Videos are available for home viewing on most laminate floors. They run about half an hour and allow you a birds-eye view of what is involved in installing a certain floor. They can be borrowed overnight if prior arrangements are made. Please call any of our 8 WNY locations.

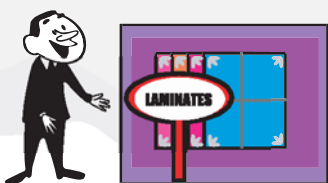
Underlayment---What about the foam under my new laminate floor?: We have listed a few things that you might like to consider when deciding between which foam is best for your application. Please note that, if your new floor is going over a concrete floor, it always needs to have a plastic moisture barrier. Some of the new floors have an all in one system which helps make the installation that much faster. There are foams that can help quiet the floor underfoot as well as those that will add a little bounce to your step. There are too many to list here, but it is something you should consult your Custom Carpet Center's professional about before the day of your install.

Types of Underlayment:

Vapor barrier - A durable foil of plastic (polyethylene usually) with the thickness of 0.2 mm, applied with an overlap of at least 8".

Underlayment foam - is typically a 2-3 mm thick roll of closed-cell plastic. It serves as a sound reducer, a cushion and it reduces the risk of squeaks.

Vapor-and-foam - is the above two in one. Handy on concrete.



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Moisture Testing You Can Do Yourself

Cut a few 2-foot-square pieces of plastic (polyethylene) and duct-tape them to various areas of the sub floor. After about 72 hours, look for wetness on the plastic by lifting up a corner of each test square. Beads of condensation on the underside of any of them, or a dark, moist sub floor indicate a moisture problem. Consult a professional for advice.

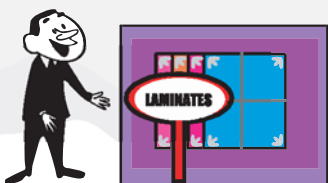
Trims and doorway moldings: It is important to ask to see what type of trims will be finishing off your doorways and entrances. Some manufacturers recommend staining pine or oak to match the color of their floor. This is often very difficult and often results in having to introduce a new color into your home. The better suppliers make matching wrapped laminate moldings, which are the exact color of your new floor. This means the doorways that get the heaviest foot traffic will have the same quality protection as the rest of your floor. Who wants to have all the entrances to your rooms scratched or nicked because they are made of an inferior product than the rest of your job? Don't be shy about asking to have these included in your in-store estimate. They can add a considerable amount to the price of the job but are as important as padding is to carpeting. This is something that quite often is overlooked until the installer is putting the finishing touches on your job. Look around your home and take notice of your door casings, cabinet color, wall base, etc. These are usually going to stay because they normally are carried through most of your home. Many times it is not practical to replace all the current woodwork in your home. A good rule of thumb is to choose a laminate color that compliments your existing woodwork. It is very difficult to get an exact match so ask for the options before you commit to a particular style of flooring.

How much should I buy?

Optional: Before you leave home take the length and the width of each area you want to cover. Deduct any major cutouts such as anything larger than a three foot by three-foot area. Take notice of each doorway and mark down what type of flooring is in the adjoining room, if any? Most manufacturers make doorway moldings that work between laminate, carpeting, vinyl floors, ceramic, hardwood, outside doors and step down areas. This will help the Custom Carpet Center sales professional give you the most accurate quote possible. Be sure to note anything that you might find unusual or that may need some extra attention to detail when selecting your new floor. The standard factor in the industry is 8-10% rounding up to the next full carton. This means if the measurements of your kitchen net out at 200 square feet and the product comes in 20 square feet cartons you should purchase 220 square feet. This will not mean that when the installers are done you are going to have 20 square feet leftover.

When the job is being laid-out the seams all must be staggered allowing the floor to have the proper spacing, which adds strength to the job. Remember, having 5-7 full boards left over is the minimal amount to have in case you need to do a repair. It is rarely one board being replaced after some damage has occurred, so be prepared. Keep in mind this is only a guideline and can go up or down depending on certain variables such as job size, carton size and lay out.

Maintenance: Laminate floors require very little maintenance. The material handles surface moisture very well, but if the core material gets wet it can expand and damage the flooring. In bathrooms and kitchens, make sure that the surface water is wiped up after spills and over spray. Unlike hardwood, laminate does not require sanding and refinishing every few years. Routine cleaning with a vacuum or a damp mop is all that is needed. Call us or stop in to any one of the 8 area Custom Carpet Centers if you have any other questions. And rest assured---laminate flooring is an excellent choice for today's active families who want the rich look and feel of wood without the maintenance, denting, scratching and shrinking problems that can occur with hardwood.



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