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Facts About Floor Care  
Michigan State University  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Home and Family Series

Elizabeth Wiegand, Cornell Extension  
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# FACTS ABOUT FLOOR CARE

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Home and Family series  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Michigan State University  
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### Which features affect floor care?

Three features — durability, resiliency and resistance to chemicals — affect floor care. Many other features are worth considering, however, if you are selecting new flooring material. The suggestions and cautions in this bulletin are concerned with these three features and how they influence floor care.

#### **DURABILITY**

The resistance to abrasion from shoes and gritty particles. Wet particles cause more wear than dry on all floors except cork tile. Scratches reduce gloss. Wax improves gloss by filling the scratches.

#### **RESILIENCY**

The ability to "give" under impact and then spring back to its original shape. Cracks and permanent dents are signs of low resiliency. Dents occur when weights of furniture and people are concentrated on small areas and not spread by adequate protectors.

#### **RESISTANCE TO CHEMICALS**

*Alkalis* often found in the home are ammonia, baking soda, borax, lye, trisodium phosphate and washing soda. All-purpose household cleaners, heavy-duty laundry detergents, oven cleaners, and wax removers usually contain one or more alkalis.

*Grease* in foods, cosmetics, baby oil, and machine oil may stain asphalt, rubber, concrete, cork and wood, unless these floors are kept well sealed. They tend to soften asphalt and rubber that are not grease resistant.

*Spirit solvents* are such liquids as alcohol, benzene, carbon tetrachloride, kerosene, naphtha, turpentine. They may damage floors by softening the surface, even eating into the underlay.

### **How should I clean my floor?**

- Remove dry dust often. Frequent removal of dry particles lessens abrasion and helps to prevent particles from soiling the protective layer of wax. Thus, wear on the floor is reduced, and wet cleaning and fresh wax are needed less often.

- Wipe up wet spills promptly, before they are tracked over the floor. If allowed to dry, they may cause stains which are difficult to remove.

- When more thorough cleaning is necessary, use a water base product or a spirit solvent, whichever is suitable for your type of floor.

- Use water for asphalt or rubber tiles. If you use one of the new water base products, you can clean and apply wax at the same time. To help you recognize them, look on the container for these words: "for asphalt, rubber, . . . , floors," "cleans and shines" and "wash 'n wax."

In case your wax product requires a separate step for cleaning, you may find damp mopping with cool water is sufficient. For stubborn soil you may choose a laundry detergent or an all-purpose household cleaner or a commercial water base floor cleaner and use it with cool or warm water. It is important to *rinse* the floor thoroughly so that no residue will remain to prevent your wax coat from becoming truly hard.

- Use spirit solvent for wood or cork floors. Actually cleaning and waxing can be combined, thus eliminating wax removal as a separate process ahead of wax application. Wood and cork are "drycleaned" with the solvent in those liquid waxes that have the words "Caution: Combustible mixture" on the container. As the solvent softens the old wax, it is rubbed onto a cloth or other applicator.

- Use either water or spirit solvent for cleaning linoleum, vinyl, vinyl-asbestos, vinyl-enamel, ceramic tile, concrete, slate, and terrazzo.

If you choose water for linoleum, be sure to use a non-alkaline cleaner such as a light-duty detergent made for fine fabrics and dishes. Alkali removes the linseed oil from linoleum making it brittle.

## What features do floors have?

Type of flooring	Advantages	Limitations	Suitable wax and cleaner
ASPHALT TILE	Excellent durability; resists damage from alkalis.	Shows scratches easily; low resiliency; poor grease resistance; softened by spirit solvents.	Use only a water base wax; either alkaline or non-alkaline cleaners are safe.
CERAMIC TILE	Excellent durability; resists grease stains very well if glazed; not affected by alkalis.	No resiliency; unglazed tile easily stained by grease; spaces between tiles are difficult to clean.	Use a sealer on unglazed tile and on mortar between either glazed or unglazed tiles.
CONCRETE	Excellent durability; not damaged by alkalis.	No resiliency; gives off dust and becomes stained by grease unless well-sealed.	Use a sealer specified for concrete.
CORK TILE	Good durability; highest resiliency.	Sharp objects will gouge it; water and grease will penetrate it unless well-sealed.	Use only spirit solvent base wax and spirit solvent base cleaners. Apply a wood sealer when necessary.
FLAGSTONE (see SLATE)			
LINOLEUM	Good durability when waxed; nearly as resilient as solid vinyl and rubber; resists grease stains very well.	Heavy weights will dent it; badly damaged by alkalis.	Use either a spirit solvent base wax or water base wax. Use only a non-alkaline cleaner to remove waterbase wax.
RUBBER TILE	Excellent durability; high resiliency.	Damaged by grease and spirit solvents.	Use only water base wax and water base cleaners.
SLATE	Excellent durability; not damaged by alkalis.	No resiliency; becomes stained by grease and solvents unless well-sealed.	Use a sealer specified for stone floors.

Type of flooring	Advantages	Limitations	Suitable wax and cleaner
<b>TERRAZZO</b> marble chips in cement	Excellent durability	Has no resiliency; is damaged by alkalis; becomes stained by grease unless well-sealed.	Use either water base wax or spirit solvent base wax; but use only a non-alkaline cleaner. Apply a sealer for stone floors when needed.
<b>VINYL</b> solid, with or without backing	Excellent durability; high resiliency like rubber; high resistance to damage by alkalis, grease, and spirit solvents.	None	Use either water base wax or spirit solvent base wax; either alkaline or non-alkaline cleaners are safe.
<b>VINYL-ASBESTOS</b>	Excellent durability; high resistance to damage by alkalis and grease.	Needs wax to cover scratches; moderate resiliency.	Use either water base wax or spirit solvent base wax, and either alkaline or non-alkaline cleaners.
<b>VINYL-ENAMEL</b>		Low durability, wears quickly; low resiliency.	Use either water base wax or spirit solvent base wax; but only non-alkaline cleaners.
<b>HARDWOODS</b>	Excellent durability; not damaged by spirit solvents.	Moderate resiliency; damaged by water, alkalis, and grease unless well-sealed.	Use only spirit solvent base wax and spirit solvent base cleaners. Apply wood sealer when needed.

## Which tools should I choose for cleaning?



If you want to minimize strain and effort, consider long-handled tools. A dolly for carrying pail, pan, or wax container is easy to move with your foot.

For cleaning with water, a mop must be easy to squeeze; an excess of water will loosen flooring. A plastic divided pail is convenient for holding both the wash water and the rinse water at the same time.

When you combine cleaning and waxing, you may prefer a long-handled lamb's wool applicator. It soaks up less wax than a sponge mop. The clean wool also makes an excellent quick buffer.

Before putting your mop, brush, or applicator away, rinse it thoroughly to keep dirt from becoming embedded in and hardened on it.

## Why wax?

Wax provides four important benefits to floors. It . . .

- reduces wear
- eases soil removal
- imparts gloss
- improves stain resistance

## Which wax should I buy?

In spite of many brands of wax shown in stores, there are only two types: *water base* and *spirit solvent base*. The type of wax should be suitable for the floor on which you apply it. You can identify these two types by looking for key words on wax containers.

### Spirit Solvent Base Waxes

<b>For wood and cork floors</b>	<b>Liquid self-polishing</b> Armstrong's One Step Wood Floor Care Johnson's Wood Klear
Identify this wax type by such key words as: "Caution: combustible mixture" "Do not use on asphalt or rubber."	<b>Liquid polishing</b> <b>Paste polishing</b> Bruce                              Butcher's Butcher's Flo paste          Johnson's Johnson's Beautiflor        Preen Stanley                          Stanley Wood Preen                      Ultra Gloss

## Water Base Waxes

<p><b>For asphalt tile and rubber tile floors</b></p>	<b>Liquid self-polishing</b>	
<p>Identify this wax type by such key words as:</p> <p>"for asphalt, rubber, . . ."</p> <p>"Keep from freezing."</p> <p>"Do not shake."</p>	<p>Aerowax Armstrong's Linogloss Bright Sail Butcher's: Bright Green Stripe White Stripe Johnson's: Bravo Glo Coat Klear Stride</p>	<p>Kengrip Kentile Vinyl Floor Finish Kitchen Preen Robbins Floor Finish Simoniz Permacrylic Stanley Floor Finish</p>
	<p><b>Liquid self-polishing: cleans and waxes</b></p> <p>Armstrong's One Step Dri brite Simoniz Vinyl Wax</p>	<p><b>Paste polishing</b></p> <p>Butcher's Tile Wax Staples Tile Wax Ultra Gloss Paste Wax</p>

### Either Spirit Solvent Base or Water Base Wax

For linoleum, vinyl, vinyl-asbestos, vinyl-enamel, ceramic tile, concrete, flagstone, slate and terrazzo floors

Waxes can have special properties in addition to self-polishing and cleaning and waxing in one operation. They may be rebufferable, light-colored, or resistant to slipping, water spotting, or scuffing. The label on the container will tell you which properties are built into each specific brand of wax.

### What is the best way to apply wax . . . to make it last? to prevent slippery floors?

If you want to make your floors less slippery, choose a brand of wax with the UL symbol and the words "slip resistant" on the label. The UL stands for Underwriters' Laboratories which test for mechanical as well as electrical safety.

The way that you apply wax greatly affects its slipperiness. If the application is too thick, the spirit solvent or water in the top of the coating will evaporate but some will be trapped below the surface; the wax underneath will remain soft and therefore slippery. Soft wax also becomes soiled quickly. Those waxes that require polishing form a hard surface because the friction of the heavy polishing tool presses out the spirit solvent or water. Self-polishing waxes are frequently applied too thick because the directions may say "to spread on floor, do *not* rub."



You need to be extremely careful to put on a *thin* layer so that it will dry thoroughly. During humid weather, wax requires more time than usual for complete drying.

### **How can I make my old linoleum or asphalt tile shine again?**

Liquids, including wax, will penetrate the pores of asphalt tile and linoleum floors that are badly worn. To correct this situation apply a clear penetrating sealer with a tung oil base. This sealer, especially made for wood, is moisture-resistant, fills the pores, and provides a tough coating. Be sure to remove old wax before applying the sealer. The sealer must be able to penetrate and thus fill the porous floors. Apply wax after the sealer has dried thoroughly.

The degree of shininess will depend on the brand of wax, the number of coats used, and the amount of buffing they receive.

### **What ideas can you give for lessening wear and care?**

These practical suggestions from homemakers may help you too:

- Remove outdoor footwear when entering your home, or change from outdoor shoes to indoor shoes or slippers.
- Provide a boot rack or plastic tray for wet footwear near your outside doors.
- Use mats or runners outside and/or inside doors leading outside.
- Have paved sidewalks or paths in your yard.
- Use wax, but choose the type of wax suitable to your floor.
- Apply wax regularly only in the traffic lanes, not from wall to wall.
- Wipe up wet spills promptly.
- Remove dry dirt often.
- Wipe off your pet's feet when it enters your home.
- Use cups, coasters, or other protectors under heavy furniture to avoid dents or cracks.

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*To simplify information, trade names of products have been used. No endorsement is intended nor is criticism implied of similar products not named.*

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