



**WORLD FLOOR COVERING
ASSOCIATION**

How to Shop for Vinyl Flooring

With the explosion of vinyl flooring products now available under the “resilient” umbrella, how can you tell the lower-quality varieties of vinyl from the truly resilient? It all starts with understanding the different products and the manufacturing processes used to make each.

Printed vs. Inlaid Vinyl

When shopping for vinyl flooring, you’ll likely come across two types: printed and inlaid.

With **printed vinyl**, patterns are printed using a paper top coat placed directly on a thin vinyl surface and then covered with several layers of clear vinyl or urethane to produce a protective wear layer. Also referred to as rotovinyl, this type of vinyl is a more affordable option to inlaid vinyl but is less durable.

Inlaid vinyl floors achieve their color and textured surface through a process that places tiny vinyl granules on the backing, forcing them up to the wear surface. This creates a much heavier, extremely durable floor, as vinyl is used throughout the entire thickness of the flooring. And because the color goes through the material from the bottom to the top, any eventual chips and scrapes are much less noticeable.

Available Formats

For residential use, vinyl is available in a few different formats, including sheet vinyl, solid vinyl tiles, and luxury vinyl tiles/planks.

Sheet vinyl generally comes in 6’ or 12’ wide rolls. When installed, this single sheet of vinyl is rolled flat and cut to the shape of the floor. As with wall-to-wall

carpet, if the floor is too large for one sheet, additional sheets are added, which creates seams where the sheets meet.

In terms of installation, there are three types of sheet vinyl: felt-backed, vinyl-backed, and modified loose-lay. The most common, felt-backed, has an added layer of felt for comfort and strength and is installed using an adhesive. Vinyl-backed, the least common, is glued only at the edges. Modified loose-lay flooring, which includes a fiberglass backing for increased strength, is typically installed using double-sided tape.

Solid vinyl tile (SVT), is a pliable tile typically available in individual 12” by 12” inch squares or in strips of three. SVT most often includes a photographic print coating that lies between the backing and a clear layer of vinyl. These tiles often include an adhesive backing and require a smooth installation surface. While tiles can be installed over old flooring that is clean and in good condition, they should not be installed directly over old tiles. For these installations, the addition of a subfloor is recommended. Vinyl tiles without adhesive require spreading an adhesive over the existing floor or subfloor before setting the tiles. Since tiles have more edges, this may cause them to become loose sooner than with sheet vinyl.

Luxury vinyl tile (LVT) is the ultimate in high-end vinyl flooring, offering a more affordable option to costly flooring materials such as natural stone and wood. Using advanced 3D imaging technology, a photograph of the natural material is transferred directly to the tile. Each tile is then uniquely embossed to match the appropriate texture. The final product, which is approximately 1/8 inch thick, is made of several layers, including a protective wear layer (mil layer) and often a urethane layer for added durability. Also available in planks, these floors do a great job of realistically capturing the textures and rich grains of the natural materials they replicate. Most tiles include beveled edges and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Wood planks can be three to four feet long, and tiles are available in very large squares that can be laid with or without grout. This realism and durability comes with a higher price tag than that of traditional solid vinyl tiles.

The All-Important Wear Layer

The wear layer and its thickness are important indicators of how well a vinyl floor will stand up to daily use. There are basically three types of wear surfaces to consider:

Vinyl no-wax is a clear vinyl top coating. The least durable of the three surfaces, no-wax vinyl requires periodic polishing to retain its luster.

A **urethane-coated finish** provides greater durability and resistance to stains and daily wear without the need for polishing.

Enhanced coatings used along with urethane finishes provide the greatest level of protection. Floors with an additional aluminum oxide coating, for example, provide outstanding resistance to scratching and are far more durable than flooring with a urethane layer alone.

Your Resilient Vinyl Choice

Resilient vinyl flooring includes a wide range of flooring options, with some of the more expensive products offering greater realism and enhanced performance. As with any flooring choice, when evaluating vinyl flooring options, it's always best to factor in your lifestyle. Considering your unique needs will help you make a selection that best matches performance and design.

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Find Out More

Want to find out more about resilient vinyl flooring from a local flooring expert? [Find your local vinyl flooring stores.](#)