

Cork Flooring

Cork is the outer bark of the cork oak tree and is typically harvested every nine years from the Mediterranean region. It is a natural, renewable product that can be used anywhere a resilient floor is needed. Cork generally comes in tiles, planks, or sheets of various sizes, is extremely durable, provides acoustical and thermal insulation, cushions underfoot, is resistant to moisture damage and decay, and is easy to clean and maintain. A wide range of patterns are available and can be found in natural, tinted, and vividly colored shades.



PRODUCT COMPARISONS

Cork Flooring

- Made of natural ingredients
- No dioxin produced in manufacture
- Low off-gassing from natural oils
- Renewable and biodegradable
- 50+ year lifespan
- Low flame spread and emissions

Vinyl Flooring

- Made of synthetic ingredients
- Dioxin produced in manufacture
- High off-gassing from petroleum distillates
- Non-renewable and non-biodegradable
- 10-20 year lifespan
- Produces dangerous emissions during a fire

LEED CREDITS

Using this material potentially contributes to obtaining these credits in the US Green Building Council's LEED certification program:

Materials & Resources

MR 6 Credit Rapidly Renewable Materials

LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. To find out more about it, visit www.leadbuilding.org

ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES

Energy Performance

Cork flooring has a negligible impact on energy performance at its point of use.

Resource Impacts

Cork's impact on the environment is quite low due to the sustainable harvesting practices and almost zero waste from the manufacturing process. Nations that harvest cork regulate how frequently it can be harvested in order to minimize damage to the trees. The trees survive the debarking process, although they are more susceptible to injury until the protective bark is regenerated. The raw materials needed to make cork flooring are minimally processed.



Cork is manufactured in Europe, and the amount of energy expended for shipping is significant. The low amount of energy expended during its manufacture, however, keeps the total amount of energy used in production lower than that for any other resilient or laminate flooring.

If properly maintained, cork flooring is very durable and long-lasting. At the end of its useful life, cork may be compostable, depending on the type of finish present.

Health Considerations

The process of agglomerating the cork requires binders to hold the ground cork granules together. Binders typically used include urea melamine, phenol formaldehyde, and natural proteins, which are relatively stable binders once processed. Cork does not offgas or shed microfibers and is naturally resistant to moisture, mold, rot, and fire.

Prior to and during combustion, cork generates less smoke and releases far less toxins than vinyl, which releases hydrochloric acid and dioxin.

As more is understood about the personal health and environmental hazards of vinyl in its use and production, cork and natural linoleum are once again becoming popular flooring.

FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cost

Cork compares in price to mid or high-end hardwood flooring, generally ranging from about \$3 to \$7 per square foot uninstalled. Long-term costs are lower than vinyl flooring due to its inherent durability. Provided its wear layer is maintained, cork can last four to five times as long as vinyl flooring.

Installation

It is very important that the cork acclimate inside the room for at least one week prior to installation. Cork tiles should be installed by an experienced professional. Most manufacturers offer cork tile in shades of light, medium, and dark, but there will always be shade variations from tile to tile, so be sure to shuffle the tiles prior to installation. Glue the tiles to the subfloor using a low- or no-VOC water-based adhesive. Cork planks can be installed as a floating floor, using glue only at the joints. "Snap-together" products that require no adhesive are also available. Floating floor products can be installed over radiant floor heating systems, though, since cork is a natural insulator it is not the best choice for this application.

Cork should not be installed in basements or other locations where there is potential for moisture to come through concrete. The installer should always test the moisture content of the subfloor prior to installation. As cork is inherently anti-microbial and resistant to mildew, it is well suited for kitchens and laundry rooms. Glue-down tiles must be used for bathroom installations, as the MDF core of planks could swell if soaked with water. Also, caulking of the bathroom perimeter is recommended prior to installing baseboard. Though cork has a closed-cell structure and is naturally water resistant, tile or concrete are better suited for wet bathroom areas.

Cork flooring can be purchased with a factory-applied finish, ready to install and use immediately. Unfinished cork can be finished with either wax or polyurethane sealants, and water-based stains of any color can be applied before finishing. Any paste wax that is recommended for wood floors



can be used; however, we recommend using a natural wax that has a beeswax base or is low-VOC. For a polyurethane finish, 3-4 coats may be required to obtain the finish you desire. Use a low-VOC water-based polyurethane. For kitchen or bathroom installations, even the pre-finished products will require additional coats of finish to seal the joints.

One manufacturer recommends not finishing the cork for at least 5 days after installation. A light sanding may also be necessary if there are uneven areas.

Maintenance

Cork is easily maintained by sweeping with a broom or cleaning with a damp mop and neutral detergent. Cork is inherently anti-static and therefore repels dust and dirt. Although cork is highly abrasion resistant, just like any other flooring material it can be punctured by sharp objects and damaged by furniture feet. If the flooring gets scratched, simply buff the area in need of repair and apply a light coat of low-VOC, water-based polyurethane or wax. Cork has a tremendous amount of “memory” and recovers well from compression. Cork floors will last as long as most hardwood floors if well maintained.

Other Data / Comments

When the surface is properly maintained, cork has been known to last 40 years or more in demanding applications, such as auditorium flooring. Cork increases in strength over time. It resists cracking and abrasions, is self-healing, and won't melt or ignite except at very high temperatures. The pattern and color penetrate the thickness of the material, so they are retained as it wears. Vinyl flooring, in contrast, has a synthetic wear layer that contains the patterning — once it's gone, the floor needs replacing.

RESOURCES

Cork flooring is widely available. For up-to-date product and retailer information, visit the manufacturers' websites or search the Green Materials Database, www.builditgreen.org/guide.

Manufacturers

Amorim Industrial Solutions

(Wicanders flooring, Acousticork underlayment)
(800) 255-2675
www.amorimsolutions.com
www.wicanders.com

BHK of America

Central Valley, NY 10917
(800) 663-4176
<http://bhkuniclic.com/home.htm>

Duro-Design Stained Cork Flooring

Quebec, Canada
(888) 528-8518
www.duro-design.com

GRANORTE Cork

Portugal
351 256 783026
www.granorte.com

Natural Cork, Inc.

(800) 404-2675
www.naturalcork.com

NOVA Distinctive Floors

1710 East Sepulveda Blvd
Carson, CA 90745
(866) 576-2458
www.novafloorings.com

WE Cork Inc.

Exeter, NH



Expanko, Inc.

3135 Lower Valley Road
Parkesburg, PA 19365
(800) 345-6202
www.expanko.com

(800) 666-CORK

www.wecork.com

Suppliers

Abbey Carpet of San Francisco

3100 Geary Blvd.
San Francisco, CA
(415) 752-6620

Flooring Alternatives

(877) 639-1345
725 Gilman Street, Suite C
Berkeley, CA 94710
www.flooringalternatives.com

Anderson Carpet

4101 Broadway
Oakland, CA 94611
(510) 652-1032

Golden State Flooring

6805C Sierra Court
Dublin, CA 94568
(925) 551-4750
www.goldenstateflooring.com

Berkeley Design Center

3195 Adeline St.
Berkeley, CA 94703
(510) 652-6064
www.berkeleydesigncenter.com

Golden State Flooring

680 8th Street, Suite #169B
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 522-5120
www.goldenstateflooring.com

Blodgett's Floorcovering

3291 Mt. Diablo Court
Lafayette, CA 94549
(925) 284-4807

Golden State Flooring

1060 Commercial Street, Suite #101
San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 392-0801
www.goldenstateflooring.com

CEM - The Showcase

2 Henry Adams Ste m6
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 861-8831

Golden State Flooring

240 Littlefield Ave.
So. San Francisco, CA 94080
(650) 872-2163
www.goldenstateflooring.com

Dal-Tile

(Acousticork underlayment)
1963 Davis Street
San Leandro, CA 94577
(510) 635-7673
www.daltile.com

Green Fusion Design Center

14 Greenfield Ave.
San Anselmo, CA 94960
(415) 454-0174
www.greenfusiondesigncenter.com

Dal-Tile

(Acousticork underlayment)
314 Lindbergh Ave
Livermore, CA 94551
(925) 449-0338
www.daltile.com

McCurley's - Shaw Floor Covering

3191-M Crow Canyon Place
San Ramon, CA 94583
(925) 866-2200
www.shawfloor.com

Eco Design Resources



633 Quarry Rd. Suite A
San Carlos, CA 94070
(650) 591-1123
www.ecodesignresources.com

EXPO Design Center
1461 Concord Ave
Concord, CA 94520
(925) 288-4400
www.expo.com

EXPO Design Center
7050 Amador Plaza Rd.
Dublin, CA 94568
(925) 479-3100
www.expo.com

EXPO Design Center
1771 E Bayshore Rd
East Palo Alto, CA 94303
(650) 289-6300
www.expo.com

EXPO Design Center
1555 40th Street
Emeryville, CA 94608
(510) 450-3300
www.expo.com

EXPO Design Center
5095 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118
(408) 979-3500
www.expo.com

Floor Dimensions
1081 Eastshore Hwy
Albany, CA 94706
(800) 378-4300
www.floordimensions.com

Floor Dimensions
3571 San Pablo Dam Road
El Sobrante, California 94803
(510) 223-3300
www.floordimensions.com

Floor Dimensions
1701 Broadway
Vallejo, California 94589

Perry Cordova Flooring
(Installer)
Antioch, CA
(925) 754-7779

Prosource
1340 Galaxy Way Suite L
Concord, CA 94520
(925) 609-9448
www.pswholesale.com
Note: Contractor membership required

Prosource
3051 Teagarden
San Leandro, CA 94577
(510) 614-9435
www.pswholesale.com
Note: Contractor membership required

Prosource
320 Swift Avenue
S. San Francisco, CA 94080
(650) 871-9600
www.pswholesale.com
Note: Contractor membership required

Prosource
1701 Junction Court
San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 987-0500
www.pswholesale.com
Note: Contractor membership required

Prosource
3410 Industrial Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
(707) 573-9117
www.pswholesale.com
Note: Contractor membership required

SD Flooring
725 Industrial Road Unit C
San Carlos, CA 94070
(650) 952-8333

**Shaw Carpet and Flooring Center/
Concord Discount Floors**
2395-J Monument Blvd.



(707) 552-5252
www.floordimensions.com

Concord, CA 94520
(925) 680-7538
www.shawfloor.com

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