

INTRODUCTION

You can easily brighten up your bathroom or kitchen by using wall tiles. These are both decorative and functional.

Wall tiles provide bright and easy-clean surfaces which are especially useful in kitchens and bathrooms. They are hard wearing and water resistant, and can help to brighten up small rooms or shaded work areas by reflecting natural light.

SKILL LEVEL ●●●●●

Good tiling is relatively easy if accompanied by careful planning. Estimate the number of tiles you need beforehand and know your design requirements if you are introducing a pattern or border. Then set out your starting point, and plan how to deal with awkward corners or recesses. Take care with spacing and bedding the tiles and clean off excess adhesive and grout as you go.

SAFETY FIRST

Protect your eyes with safety glasses or goggles when cutting tiles. Be careful of snapped tile edges because they can cut you. To protect sensitive or dry skin, gloves should be used when applying adhesive or grout (the ready-mixed paste which fills the gaps between adjacent tiles).

TO COMPLETE THIS PROJECT YOU WILL NEED...

- Bucket
- Edging Trim
- Files
- Plumb Bob & Line
- Spacers
- Spirit Level
- Sponges
- Steel Rule
- Straight Wood Battens
- Tape Measure
- Tile Adhesive
- Tile Adhesive Spreader
- Tile Grout
- Tile Nibbler/Tile File
- Tile Saw
- Tile Scorer/Tile Platform Grouting Dowel
- Soft Cloth
- Cutter
- Wall Tiles

HOW TO: WALL TILING

1 - TILE CHOICE

Ceramic wall tiles are available in a wide choice of sizes, colours, designs and shapes. Square tiles are the most common, but other shapes include rectangles, hexagons, diamonds, octagons or interlocking designs. Wall tiles are thinner (4 to 6mm thick) than floor tiles, as they are subject to less wear. They are easier to work with and cut or snap to a scored line. They are also brittle and will chip or break easily if dropped.

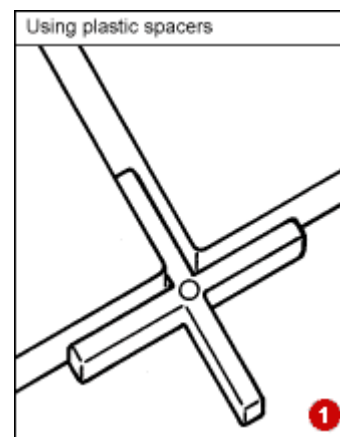
Combination tiles feature a pattern or design motif on a background and coordinate with plain tiles. They allow you to add interest to an otherwise plain wall.

Universal tiles have bevelled edges and/or spacing lugs to give correct spacing for grout between tiles.

Standard field tiles have square edges and must be spaced by other means. Plastic spacers can be used to give even spacing for the grout. ❶

Rectangular border tiles (often half-size), ceramic edging trims and mouldings are available to give definition to the tiled area. Clearly defined and well-finished edges give a professional look.

Grout lines must be aligned and a constant width, as the eye is drawn to the straight lines of the grouting. When choosing a border tile or trim, make sure that it is the same width as the other tiles used.



2 - SURFACE PREPARATION

Tiles can be stuck to most surfaces with the right preparation. The surface must be flat because tiles reflect light and show up any unevenness.

Surfaces must be clean, dry and stable. Crumbling plaster must be removed and all imperfections and holes made good. Newly plastered walls must be allowed to dry thoroughly for several months.

Flaky, crumbly and absorbent surfaces can be primed with a PVA-based adhesive. Use a building/construction type as directed. Waterproof adhesive should also be used in areas which could become wet.

Old ceramic tiles do not have to be removed: you can tile on top. Check if they are firmly fixed - if not, use a good tile adhesive to stick them into place. Make sure that the joints between the new tiles are not in the same place as the old ones.

You do not have to re-plaster a wall that is either bare brick or taken down to brick level. Use exterior grade ply or plasterboard fixed to the wall to give a clean and flat base surface on which to tile.

Do not attempt to tile over wallpaper. This must be stripped back to plaster first. If tiling over a gloss-painted surface, roughen up the surface with coarse abrasive paper to provide a key to which the adhesive will bond.

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3 - MEASURING & PLANNING

The number of tiles needed for plain, uninterrupted wall areas is easy to calculate. Find out the number required for the height and for the width (counting part tiles as whole tiles). Multiply the two together and add a further 10% for breakages.

There can be significant variations between batches of tiles. Always buy the quantity you need in the first place and check that all the boxes are from the same batch.

Window recesses and alcoves should be calculated separately and added on. If you are using patterned tiles as inserts, these must be calculated and deducted from your total figure.

If you want to incorporate patterned or motif tiles, plan their exact positions using graph paper, with each large square representing a tile. Shade in where you want the patterned tiles to fall. Stick with this plan because it may be difficult to change once you have started tiling.

STEP 1: Make a tiling gauge from a length of straight wooden batten (say 1.8m or 2.4m of planed 2 x 1in wood). Mark the spacing of the tiles on it and the separate spacer gaps if used.

Starting at the top of the skirting board, use the tiling gauge to plan your tile rows. If a narrow strip is left at the top, move the bottom row up by half a tile width to give more even margins.

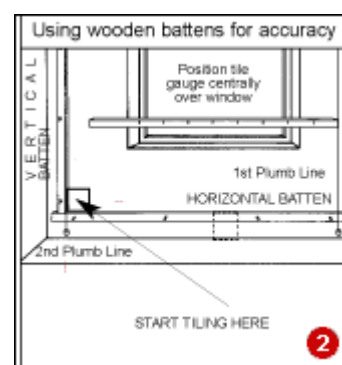
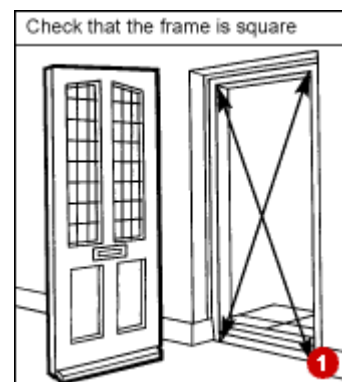
STEP 2: Using a spirit level, mark out the first horizontal row of tiles to be fixed above the floor or skirting boards. This must be one tile height or less above the base level. Nail a thin guide batten along this line so that the tiles can be positioned against it.

Use masonry nails for the guide battens, but do not drive them fully in - then they can be removed easily.

STEP 3: Mark a vertical line down the centre of the wall, using a plumb bob and line. Use the gauge stick again to set out the vertical rows on each side of this line.

If the border tiles measure less than half a tile width, move the rows sideways by half a tile. Fix another guide batten against the final vertical line.

Since very few lines or fittings in a house are truly horizontal or vertical, you will probably have to cut 'filler' tiles to fit in odd areas around skirting boards, architrave and corners between walls.



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4 - LAYING THE TILES

Most ceramic tile adhesives can be bought ready-mixed and some can also be used for grouting between the tiles.

STEP 1: Use a notched spreader (normally supplied with the tile adhesive) to apply the adhesive evenly over the surface to be tiled. The ridges in the adhesive allow for positioning and bedding of the tiles. Cover an area of about 1m² (1yd²) at a time, to prevent the adhesive drying out. ❸

STEP 2: Start with the first tile in the corner formed by the two guide battens, pressing it until it is firmly fixed. Continue by adding the tiles on each side, building up three or four rows at a time. Use spacers between the tiles if they are not the self-spacing universal type.

Continue with successive rows of tiles until the whole area has been built up, applying new adhesive as and when required.

Periodically, use a damp sponge to wipe any excess adhesive from the surface of the tiles.

STEP 3: The guide battens can be removed after 12 hours and the cut filler tiles fitted (see 'Cutting tiles to fit').

Tiles in a window recess, and particularly on a window sill, should be laid to overlap the wall tiles. ❹

Better still, use plastic edge trim to give a neat quadrant moulding between the two surfaces and to protect the edges from accidental knocks and chips.

Edge trim is supplied in 1.8m lengths, in a variety of colours to suit tiles and grouting. It is the same thickness as standard tiles and is simply bedded into the tile cement under the top surface tiles.

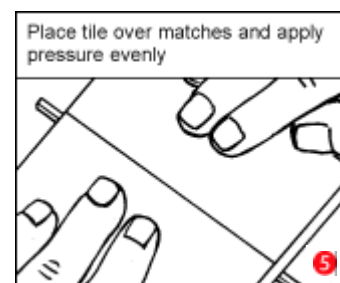
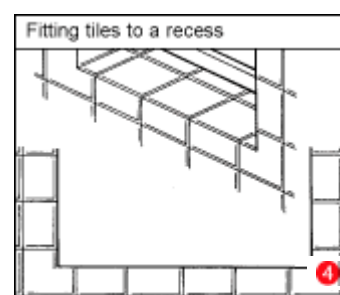
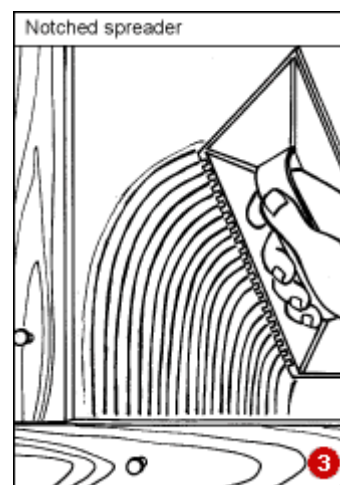
5 - CUTTING TILES TO FIT

STEP 1: To mark each filler tile, place it face down, partly overlapping the tile next to the space and butting up against the adjacent wall or ceiling. On the edge of the tile mark where it needs to be cut (taking account of spacing), using a sharp chinagraph pencil or child's crayon. Turn the tile over and draw a line between the two edge marks with a ruler.

Do not use felt-tip pens for marking out. The ink may run into the unglazed portion of the tile and may also bleed into the grouting and discolour it.

STEP 2: Using a steel rule as a guide, score along the marked line with a tungsten-tipped cutter. Make one good strong stroke to penetrate the glazed surface of the tile.

STEP 3: Place tiles glazed side up over either matchsticks or a thin wooden kebab-type skewer, placed directly under the scored line. ❺ Apply even pressure with the hands either side to snap the tile along the scored line.



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Alternatively, use a tile-snapping tool with the jaws directly aligned with the score mark or use a platform cutting table with a scoring wheel to score and snap the tiles. **5**

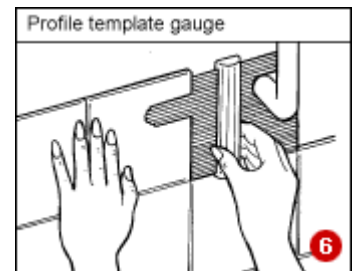
Where you need to remove thin strips of tile, and even pressure cannot be successfully applied to snap it, nibble away at the excess tile with a pair of tile nibblers.

You may have to break the tile away in several smaller pieces along the score line, and the cut edge may require smoothing with a tile file.

STEP 4: To fit tiles around shaped areas such as a washbasin or around a pipe, use a profile template gauge **6** to copy the shape and transfer it to the surface of the tile.

Alternatively, use card cut-outs to trace the shape onto the tile. Grip the tile firmly, but without excessive pressure, in a wooden vice or in the jaws of a Workmate, then cut to shape with a tile saw. This has a blade like a thin round file, which is held in a frame similar to a junior hacksaw.

When working in confined spaces, it is often easier to apply adhesive to the rear of the tile rather than to the wall - especially when fitting filler tiles.



6 - GROUTING

Grout can be applied 24 hours after tiling. Professionals use a 'squeegee' type tool, but a piece of dense foam sponge or a rubber spreader are also suitable.

STEP 1: Use the spreader to force the grout into the gaps between the tiles. Spread in all directions to ensure the gaps are well filled.

STEP 2: After covering the surface area to be worked, wipe away the excess grout with another sponge, rinsing it frequently in a bucket of clean water.

To give an even, polished finish to the grout, use a piece of dowel to run down the grout lines, to ensure an even depth and thickness to the grouting lines.

STEP 3: When the grout is dry, polish the tiled area with a soft cloth or rolled-up ball of newspaper.

7 - DRILLING TILES

Certain bathroom fittings such as hooks, soap dishes and rings are made as ceramic tile inserts. However, you may wish to add screwed-on towel rails or similar fittings.

STEP 1: First mark the hole position in chinagraph pencil.

STEP 2: With a hard, pointed tool (a centre punch or hole-boring tool), make a dimple in the tile. This will score the surface as a starting point for your masonry drill.

HOW TO: WALL TILING

STEP 3: To prevent the drill point from slipping when starting up, cover the area with masking tape and drill through this, using the dimple as a starting guide.

To prevent the tile from cracking when tightening a screw fixing, make sure that the wall plug is fully seated in the wall behind the tile. Tightening a screw expands the plug in the hole. If the plug is still seated within the tile, the tile may crack.