

How to Choose the Right Flooring

When it comes to selecting flooring, homeowners are faced with myriad choices. To help make the process a little less confusing, experts advise you to first consider the room's use. "Know how much and what type of traffic the flooring will have to support, says Lou Jenkins, owner of Dungans Floors in McKinney. "If it's a family room, laminate flooring would be a good choice. It's made to look like wood, stone or slate, but doesn't have any of the maintenance concerns that those materials do. If it's a kitchen or bath, where water is a concern, consider vinyl flooring. Today's vinyl floors are beautiful and durable, and they come in a variety of styles and colors."

Consider your decorating style. Do you prefer a traditional look? You might choose a classic oak or elegant cherry hardwood. One of the most popular looks in hardwood flooring today is the hand-scraped floor. It offers a unique texture that can compliment any décor. Hardwood flooring requires occasional polishing, but the classic look is certainly worth the work, Mr. Jenkins says.

Finally, consider your lifestyle. Do you have children or pets? If so, you may want to choose a super-durable flooring, like porcelain tile. Porcelain is harder and stronger than regular ceramic tile, and it needs little maintenance. "I have tile in almost every room of my house," Mr. Jenkins says. "You can't beat it for durability, style and maintenance. And today's tiles come in an array of colors and sizes, with decorative accent pieces to help give your floor a custom look."

Is your home your sanctuary? Consider bamboo, teak or mahogany to bring the warmth of the tropics into your home—they are durable surfaces that will last for years. If you really want to wow your visitors, granite or marble flooring is an option. Both materials can be expensive, but they will last a lifetime and require only occasional polishing. Keep in mind that you will need to keep the floor clean and dry. Moisture or dirt on a marble or granite floor can create slippery spots that could be dangerous.

Once you've decided on the right flooring, "have the house measured, so you'll know exactly how much material you'll need," Mr. Jenkins advises. "Some stores sell carpeting by the square foot, others by the square yard. Wouldn't you rather pay \$3 per square foot than \$27 per square yard? It sounds cheaper, but if the room isn't totally square, or if you have bookcases or a fireplace to work around, you'll have waste."

Mr. Jenkins also recommends that you ask for quotes prices to include a top-quality pad or subfloor. "Without the proper underlayment, any flooring will wear much faster." A good underlayment will soften the feel of the floor. It also will greatly reduce noise. This will keep a pet's nails from keeping you up at night.

One final piece of advice: pay attention to warranties. "Warranties are only as good as the retailer who sells you the flooring," he says.