

LOG HOME LIVING

6 Tips for Flooring in Your Log Home

Flooring makes a home — and it also can take a big bite out of your budget if you're not careful. Here are six tips for making the right choices underfoot.



1. What are the most important things I should consider when buying flooring materials?

First, remember that flooring is about more than just good looks. Indeed, budget, wear, health, comfort and maintenance all figure into your choices. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, you can add installation requirements such as tools and experience to the list. While there's no actual budget amount that should be allotted for flooring, you should expect to pay anywhere from \$2 to \$20 per square foot, which accounts for different materials — from carpeting to hardwood — throughout the house. Wall-to-wall carpet offers the most economical alternative in most situations, and lower grades of vinyl run a close second.

As you might guess, ceramic tile, slate, marble or exotic hardwoods occupy the high end of the cost range. As a baseline, consider that a bargain grade of carpeting may retail for less than a dollar a square foot, but with the addition of carpet padding and installation, the final tally will generally exceed three dollars per square foot. To get a better handle on budget, mark up a copy of your floorplans to show the type of flooring for each area of the house — then add up the square footage for each room. From there, visit flooring suppliers to obtain installed costs for each type of flooring you're considering. Add 10 to 15 percent for waste and taxes.

2. Since my home's budget is tight, what are the best options for flooring in moderate-traffic areas? Moderate-traffic areas like hallways, living and dining rooms benefit from sturdy carpeting. Because carpet is easy to remove, it's a good choice in areas you may wish to re-cover with hardwood later. Berber carpeting wears well and, at least when compared to longer loop or shag, is easy to clean. If carpeting is your short-term solution, treat the area and prepare it as if the hardwood is going in now.



Set door heights and trim as if the floor will be hardwood. This will save time and money when you actually install the pine or oak floors you crave. I've also installed vinyl, available in stone and ceramic patterns, in many log homes. Adhesive-backed vinyl tile — most of which you can install yourself — usually provides the most affordable option. Basements and mudrooms are always great places for vinyl.

You also can paint or apply an epoxy coating for an easy, inexpensive finish to concrete. If you'd like concrete to be used as a finished

floor, be sure and tell the concrete finishers. Unless told otherwise, many finishers simply sweep the damp concrete to give a “broom finish” that won't be slippery when wet but won't have the smooth, finished look you associate with decorative concrete floors. You also can have the concrete subcontractor color the concrete. A couple coats of sealer on dyed or colored concrete provides an attractive floor for utility and basement areas.

3. What types of things do I need to think about when it comes to wear and tear in high-traffic areas?

Hardwood flooring usually works best in areas of the house where the traffic is most intense. Be careful of softwood flooring such as pine, which will scar easily from things like pet claws. Finish hardwood flooring with several coats of a polyurethane varnish — the kind that's used to finish commercial and gymnasium floors. If you anticipate heavy traffic to and from the outdoors, make sure you have an all-weather floor covering just inside exterior doors. Make this covering large enough for people to remove boots and coats and

dry opened umbrellas. Slate, ceramic tile and heavy-duty vinyl will work well, but be sure they have a non-skid surface. Slick ceramic tile sometimes can send a running child or pet slipping and sliding into a nasty fall.

4. I've seen all kinds of flooring materials used in the kitchen — from ceramic tile to slate — but I worry about keeping it clean. What are some flooring materials that both look good and can endure the traffic, spills and bumps that are part of life in the kitchen?

Kitchen floors present special challenges. They should look good, clean easily, resist stains from spills and dents from dropped kitchenware, and be comfortable to stand on for long periods of time. Ceramic tile and slate create striking kitchen floors. If properly sealed, they'll resist stains and clean easily. Of course, there are drawbacks: The floors tend to be cold, and grout joints are notoriously difficult to keep clean even when sealed repeatedly. Heavy-duty vinyl imitates the look of slate and tile and is a breeze to clean. Another option: high-quality vinyl, which installs easily for do-it-yourselfers.



5. We're installing radiant-floor heating in our home. Does one type of flooring material complement this technology better than another?

Yes, your flooring choices will have an impact on the efficiency of a radiant-floor system. Concrete and gypcrete (gypsum-based concrete) provide excellent mass for storing and radiating heat from fluid carried through embedded tubing underneath the floor. Concrete's high density helps moderate temperature swings so the radiant system doesn't have to continually re-adjust for temperature fluctuations in the core. However, radiant-floor heating isn't limited to concrete floors.

Most systems can be used with any floor covering. In fact, your contractor can install special subflooring that contains grooves for the tubes and thermal-deflection material used in radiant-floor heating. The grooves direct heat upward through the flooring. (Note: The benefits of the system's heat transfer

will be lost if you use high-density flooring like carpeting or cork.) When it comes to hardwood flooring and radiant heat, be sure your contractor acclimates the wood thoroughly. (Actually, you should do this no matter what type of heating you use.) Move the flooring into the area where it will be installed and leave it for several weeks with the HVAC system running. This will help eliminate shrinkage and unexpected wood movement.

6. I've read a lot about bamboo flooring and its "green" factor. Does it have any drawbacks?

Because it grows so rapidly and can be harvested without killing the plant, bamboo qualifies for the rapidly renewable resource credit in the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program. If bamboo flooring is manufactured without using urea-formaldehyde binders, it also qualifies for an indoor air quality credit. These characteristics are responsible for bamboo's reputation as a "green" product. You'll typically find bamboo in either flat-grained or edge-grained flooring.

Flat-grained floors show the bamboo's "knuckles." (If you've ever seen a bamboo pole, you've noticed the periodic swelling along the cane. These are the knuckles.) Edge-grained bamboo doesn't show the knuckle patterns. Bamboo flooring has two natural colors: a blond similar to maple flooring, and a deeper brown (the latter is the result of a heat-treating process). Bamboo also can be stained. If building green is an important goal (and I think it should be), be prepared to do some research and make some tradeoffs. Keep in mind that almost all bamboo flooring comes from China, where environmental controls on its growth and harvest vary widely.

China currently doesn't allow inspections of how bamboo is grown, harvested and processed, which means that it's hard to tell if environmentally friendly methods and materials have been used. (By the way, it's a myth that the bamboo used in flooring exhausts the food resources for China's endangered giant pandas.) Before you buy bamboo flooring, learn from the manufacturer if urea-formaldehyde binders were used in its creation, and find out how it was transported to our shores. If efficiency wasn't considered, then buying this type of flooring will do more harm than good.
