

How to Tile your Backsplash in No Time

Creating a tile backsplash is a fun project that is easy to tackle, especially if you have a helper!

Doing a backsplash in tile is a two day project simply because of the drying time required for the adhesive and the grout. This is a perfect weekend project to add value to your kitchen and make it look great!

Materials Needed:

- Wet saw (Diamond-blade metal grinder if necessary)
- Notched trowel
- Grout float
- Ceramic tiles
- 1/4" spacers
- Mastic adhesive
- Drill with mixing attachment
- Grout
- Level
- Safety glasses

Note: These instructions are supplied for use with ceramic, ceramic glazed or porcelain glazed tiles. Some adjustments may need to be made for using stone tile, especially in the methods used to cut the tiles.

Step 1: Preparing the Area:

Make sure the backsplash on your countertop is level. This is especially important when using smaller tiles. If you're installing large tiles that will fill the space between the backsplash and the top cabinets, you don't need to worry about the backsplash being level. You will want to mark a reference line to show how high the back splash will be applied. This visible horizontal line should be level with the countertop.

Clean the surface of the wall with warm soapy water. Ensure that all debris and dirt is removed from the surface that will be tiled. Even the slightest bit of grease can affect the way the mastic adheres to the wall surface. If the surface has wallpaper, remove it. Ensure the backing of the wallpaper is removed as well.

Step 2: Lay Out the Design:

Locate and mark the center point of each area to be tiled.

To determine the number of tiles needed for your project, do a dry run of the layout. This is completed by starting with a tile at your starting point (the edge of the center point that you already marked out). Then place a second tile next to it. Now take the first tile and 'leap frog' it over the second tile and so forth all the way down to the edge of your project area.

This will help you decide how to lay out the tiles to prevent awkward small pieces at the ends or any unfinished tile edges showing visibly.

If the end pieces will be very small, repeat the dry run, centering the first tile on the center mark. This will allow you to cut larger and more attractive corner pieces. If one side of your tile work will have exposed edges, use whole tiles near the edge and cut only the tiles that will be close to the wall.

It is recommended to lay out the tiles for your backsplash on the counter top in the order they will be applied to the wall surface. This ensures that you do not mix up the specific pieces and put them in the wrong place in the layout.

Tip!: Since you likely won't be purchasing a wet saw for this project you can rent one from your home renovation store for a reasonable price, usually around \$50 a day. Even better, you can save money and time by marking your cut lines on the tiles and taking them to your home renovation store. Most stores can cut the tiles for you based on a price per cut. This can save you a great deal of money if you don't have many cuts to make.

Step 3: Applying Adhesive:

Scoop out a large dollop of mastic adhesive with the notched trowel. Spread the mastic adhesive on the wall starting from the center mark. Spread the mastic towards the horizontal reference line. Then continue to spread the mastic horizontally along the surface. Spread only as much adhesive to the surface as you can work with in a 10 minute time frame.

To apply the mastic, hold your trowel at a 45 degree angle with the notched side of the trowel against the surface. The notches in the adhesive allow for even distribution of the mastic to the tile.

Step 4: Placing Tiles:

Beginning at the center mark, set the tiles firmly in place in a straight row. Make sure to use spacers to ensure that your grout lines will be even. Do not set any corner pieces in place unless they are uncut. (See below)

Important Info: Trim any tiles to fit around electrical outlets using the diamond blade metal grinder or a wet saw. To do this, first measure the size of the electrical outlet or fixture. Transfer the measurement to the tile. Using the wet saw or grinder cut out the opening by starting first on the front side of the tile but not cutting all the way to the corner. Turn the tile over and complete cutting to the corners from the back side of the tile. ***Always wear safety glasses when cutting tile!***

After the first row is completed, begin on the second row. Repeat the process until you have reached the top of the horizontal reference line. It is important to check your work as you go to ensure that your lines are level. Also check to ensure your spacers are firmly in place so tiles do not slip down.

Corner Tiles: Cut corner tiles with a wet saw. Place on the surface with the cut side facing the corner. This will hide any unfinished edges from being noticeable with the end project.

Let tiles set in place for about 1/3 of the recommended time to dry on the mastic adhesive label. At this time, remove the spacers gently so as not to jar the tiles. Tiles should be set up enough to stay in place without the spacers for the remaining drying time.

Step 5: Applying Grout:

Tip!: Selecting the grout to use largely depends on the project at hand. If you are using smaller tiles, likely your grout line will be smaller. Using unsanded grout is recommended for smaller grout lines. When selecting the color of your grout, keep in mind that a similar color to your tile will allow for a seamless look. Choosing a contrasting color can provide a bold look, but may grow tiresome to the eyes.

Mix the grout according to package directions, to the consistency of peanut butter. It is helpful sometimes to use a drill with a mixing attachment set at a low speed.

Apply the grout with a rubber grout float. If the space for the grout lines is a bit larger, you may need to work the grout into each line individually.

Allow the grout to sit for 10 minutes then wipe off the excess with a tile sponge. Make sure to hold your sponge at a 45-degree angle to avoid 'digging out' the grout from the lines. You just want to clean up the surfaces of the tile and make sure the grout lines are not thicker in one area more than any others.

Allow the grout to dry to the full drying time as indicated on the package label.

You can now replace the receptacle covers on the wall.

Note: you will need to use longer screws to compensate for the thickness of the tile.