

## COUNTERTOPS

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### QUARTZ

This manufactured countertop material is typically nonporous and doesn't require sealing. Depending on the brand, quartz is scratch-, stain-, and heat-resistant and stands up well to normal use. Not all brands are created equal; reading your product warranty could contain some tip-offs as to what you can expect. If scratches aren't covered, that's a strong hint to be extra mindful about knives and rough-bottomed cookware.

A natural benefit of quartz countertops is the minimal cleaning required to keep them sanitary and functioning at their highest potential. Due to the non-porous nature of the material, stains and spills are not easily absorbed into the surface and quartz is incredibly resistant to staining and corrosion from oils, liquids and most household cleaning products, which makes clean up and fairly easy job.

Although quartz countertops will resist permanent staining when exposed to liquids like wine, vinegar, tea, lemon juice, and soda, or fruits and vegetables, it's important to wipe up spills immediately before they have a chance to dry. Fresh spills can be wiped up with a simple household cleaner or dishwasher detergent and a soft cloth (although some people find that window cleaner works best).

Simply apply the cleaning product or detergent to any stains, leave the cleaner on the surface for about two minutes, and remove with a non-scratch pad. After wiping off the household cleaner, use a damp cloth to remove any residue, then dry the surface.

For tougher stains like food, nail polish, or paint, it is recommended to keep a plastic putty knife handy to gently scrape off messes that harden as they dry. But be sure not to use a sharp knife near your quartz countertops quartz is a hard surface, but not hard enough to withstand the effects of sharp objects like knives.

Here is a step-by-step guide for how to clean quartz countertops:

1. Wipe down your quartz countertops with a soft rag and mild detergent. Clean the counter with soap and warm water daily, if possible.
2. For any dried food or other stains, use a blunt scraper such as a plastic putty knife to scrape off and then remove.
3. For grease stains, wipe away grease with a degreasing cleaner. Spray the counter with a degreasing and disinfectant cleanser that doesn't contain bleach. Alternately, use disinfectant bleach-free wipes. Rinse immediately afterward with a sponge or wet cloth. For grease stains, look for cleaning products that are specifically formulated for quartz countertops.
4. For extra tough stains or anything sticky, you can also use a cleaning solution like Goo Gone. Wet a cloth with a citrus cleaner like Goo Gone. Try pouring a bit of cleaner onto the stain and allow it to sit for five to ten minutes before wiping it up, if the stain is particularly tough. Follow up by cleaning the counter well with warm water.
5. Be sure to dry countertops off with a towel after you finish cleaning. Although quartz is resistant to most stains, it is not resistant to harsh chemicals.

Do not expose your quartz surfaces to abrasive, strong alkaline, acid, free radicals, oxidizers or the like (whether high, neutral or low pH) cleaners. Furthermore, other popular cleaning products like bleach, oven cleaners, Comet®, and paint thinners will do more harm than good for your quartz countertops. Never use abrasive or harsh scrub pads; instead use soft pads and cloths.

And finally, do not apply any sealants or topical treatments to quartz surfaces, since these types of products will wear off and cause the gloss to appear dull and lose its natural sheen.

### **Keep Heat Away from Quartz**

It's important to note that quartz countertops are not heat-proof. Unlike some other natural stones, quartz can be damaged by heat, so homeowners should be prepared to protect their quartz countertops with the use of trivets and hot pads to prevent heating the top.

Refrain from placing hot skillets or roasting pans directly onto the surface of quartz

countertops, and be aware of the potential damage to the surface by heat-generating appliances such as electric grills or crockpots. In addition, as with any natural stone, prolonged exposure to heat may cause cracks in quartz countertops.

Another potential drawback, or quality to be aware of with quartz countertops is that they can discolor over time when exposed to direct sunlight. If you have a part of your counter that receives some of the UV rays from the sun while another part doesn't, over time you may see a color difference. Otherwise, quartz countertops will weather and age fairly well.

Quartz countertops are incredibly durable. With just a small amount of care, your quartz surfaces will look as great as the day you installed them for years to come.

## GRANITE AND MARBLE

Sealing is the least understood granite- and marble-care checkpoint. Sealer makes a counter stain-resistant *not stainproof* by creating a barrier that delays how quickly the surface absorbs a spill.

There's no hard-and-fast resealing schedule, but there is a simple test: Put a few drops of water on your counter and they should bead up. If the water is still on the surface after 10 or 15 minutes, your sealer is in good shape. But if the drops have spread and leave a dark mark on the stone after you blot off the excess, it's time to reseal.

Most hardware stores and home centers carry countertop sealers with detailed application instructions on the packaging. The work typically consists of cleaning and drying the surface, then applying the liquid sealer with a brush or cloth. Let stand for five to 15 minutes, depending on the product, then remove the excess with a dry cloth and buff with a microfiber. Done.

To tackle oil stains on marble, try a non-abrasive liquid cleaner with bleach; mineral spirits, acetone, or ammonia are also effective, but do not mix these substances! Clean up food stains with a solution of hydrogen peroxide and a few drops of ammonia.

Removing stains from granite and marble may be as simple as a trip to your pantry. For oil stains, blot up any excess oil, then sprinkle the mark with cornstarch and let it sit for 18 to 24 hours. Vacuum up the cornstarch and repeat the process if necessary.

For food and drink stains, mix five tablespoons of dish soap with a cup of flour or baking soda. Add enough water to create a paste-like consistency and pread the paste over the stain. Cover it with plastic wrap and let sit overnight. Gently remove the mixture with warm water and a sponge. Do not scrub: Baking soda is a mild abrasive that can scratch shining surfaces. For persistent stains, beef up the paste with some hydrogen peroxide (or a few drops of ammonia) and reapply.

Etching is perhaps marble's biggest problem. It mimics rings left by glassware, but etching is actually a type of corrosion caused by chemical interactions, which eats away the surface shine. To make etching less noticeable, wet the surface, then sprinkle on marble polishing powder and rub it in with a damp cloth or a buffing pad on a low speed drill.

### **SOLID SURFACES**

Remove fine scratches or stubborn stains by applying a mild abrasive in small circular motions on the entire surface. These solid surfaces can acquire a plastic-y patina, which can be removed professionally.

### **CONCRETE**

A stainproof finish should be applied before installation by the fabricator or manufacturer; the surface cannot be retro-finished. A seasonal application of tung oil can boost the stain resistance of sealed concrete; paste wax lends a warm, slightly glossy look.

### **CERAMIC TILE**

When it comes to maintenance, it's not the tile but the grout that needs attention. Clean stained grout with a toothbrush and mildew-fighting cleaner or bleach diluted with water; rinse carefully. Sealing grout fends off stains and mildew. Tiles can also be re-caulked with mildew-resistant silicone products.

Perhaps the most important step in countertop care is accepting that every surface will eventually accumulate a few scratches and dings with regular use. "There's a myth that there's an indestructible countertop material that requires no maintenance," Brooks says. "There is nothing like that." He believes that attitude is everything. "If you look at a surface and recognize that it's OK, then it is OK."

materials are tough and durable, so keeping kitchen work surfaces in good shape relies more on common-sense daily use than on occasional onerous upkeep rituals.

Certain “dos and don’ts” apply to just about every readily available countertop material. Among them:

- Clean counters regularly with a sponge or soft cloth and a mild, non-abrasive cleaner such as dish soap and warm water; rinse and dry to nix smudges and water spots.
- Head off stains at the pass by wiping up spills promptly, especially notorious villains like tea, coffee, soda, red wine, oil, tomatoes, vinegar and lemon.
- No counter material appreciates puddles. Standing water can leave a film or mineral deposit; it dulls surfaces, causes grout to mildew, damages laminates’ seams, harms wood and shortens the lifespan of sealers.
- Knives and high heat are not any countertop’s best friends. Keep cutting boards and trivets (or hot pads) handy. Protect surfaces from warm appliances like toaster ovens.
- If jumbo-size canned goods drop from your overstocked pantry like bombs, or you juggle with cast iron frying pans, expect serious dent, chip, and crack issues.

## WOOD

Butcher block surfaces should be rubbed with tung, linseed, or mineral oil anywhere from monthly to quarterly, depending on how much use your kitchen gets. Small burns, cuts, and scratches can be sanded out of butcher block. Remove stains by sponging on a mixture of one teaspoon of lemon juice or hydrogen peroxide per ¼ cup of water. For tough stains, use wood bleach (oxalic acid); follow package directions and rinse thoroughly.

Non-butcher block wood countertops are usually finished with marine oil, which boosts stain resistance. Brooks recommends refreshing marine-oiled countertops monthly with Weiman’s Furniture Cream.

## SOAPSTONE

Naturally nonporous and stain-resistant, soapstone doesn’t need sealing. But cooking oil – or even just skin contact – can tarnish the surface color. Keep the countertop

color uniform with sealer or by rubbing with mineral oil. Mineral oil will darken soapstone's natural gray hue; sealing will not.

Soapstone is relatively soft, so it will nick, scratch and chip, lending the surface a natural, organic quality. Scratches can be buffed out with fine sandpaper or left to create a patina.

### STAINLESS STEEL

Count on stainless steel to scratch. Minor scratches can be buffed out using an abrasive pad applied in a circular motion. Whether a stainless steel countertop will dent depends on the thickness of the material and how it is installed. 14-gauge metal bonded to a waterproof core is "so solid you could park a Hummer on it," says Brooks.

Even good-quality stainless steel can pick up rust marks from metal scouring pads, cast iron pans, and other rust-prone items. A mild abrasive cleanser or a homemade paste of lemon juice and baking soda will banish rust.

### LAMINATES

Treat stains on laminates with a paste of baking soda and water; let the paste sit for three to five minutes, then gently rinse without scrubbing. For tough stains, try rubbing for a minute or two with a cotton ball dampened with household bleach; rinse and dry.