

What is the laminate floor?

Unheard of before the mid-1970s, laminate floors are now the staple of millions of homes. Once installed mainly as a type of [economy flooring](#), [laminate floors](#) still firmly hold their place as inexpensive, functional flooring.

But [laminate floors](#) have even moved into higher-end homes that once would have installed nothing but solid hardwood or engineered wood flooring. With innovations like deeper embossing and sharper image layers, [laminate floors look better](#), perform better, and feel better underfoot than ever before. All of this popularity may beg the question: What are laminate floors in the first place?

Basics of Laminate Floor

Laminate floors are a hybrid floor covering consisting of a particleboard wood base topped by an image layer and a transparent wear layer.

Laminate floors are a popular type of floor covering for homes' living areas, kitchens, dining areas, [bedrooms](#), hallways, and other areas that are not subject to excessive moisture.

Swedish company Perstorp invented [Laminate floors](#) in 1977. The idea was to use waste wood projects by subjecting them to high pressure, heat, and binding chemicals. The result: usable floor coverings that were actually quite beautiful.

Since that time, many other manufacturers such as Dupont, Mannington, Armstrong, and [Shaw](#) now make **laminate** floors.

The Spruce / Margot Cavin

laminate floor Pros and Cons

Pros

- Easy to clean
- Scratch resistant
- Good for high-impact homes
- Relatively inexpensive

Cons

- moisture ruins laminate floor
- Top layer may chip
- Poor for full bathrooms

- Lower resale value

Pros

Laminate floors have smooth surfaces that are free of seams, making them easy to clean.

Laminate floors never need wet mopping. A dry mop or broom will take care of most of the dust and dirt. For deep cleaning, it's best to use a hard surface mopping tool that dispenses cleaning fluid instead of water.

Scratch-resistant due to their tough wear layer, most homes are well suited for [homes with pets](#) and children.

Laminate floors are inexpensive relative to other types of floor coverings, though some premium laminate floors can cost as much as solid hardwood or engineered wood flooring.

Cons

Constructed largely of moisture-sensitive particleboard, **laminate flooring** can swell beyond repair if subjected to water for too long. In theory, laminate flooring is waterproof—only if all boards are perfectly joined with no seams and if the edges are all trimmed with waterproof baseboards.

Laminate flooring is not suitable for any place where moisture is prevalent. That can be a problem since it often rules out full bathrooms, laundry rooms, and sometimes even key areas in kitchens, like in front of dishwashers or behind refrigerators.



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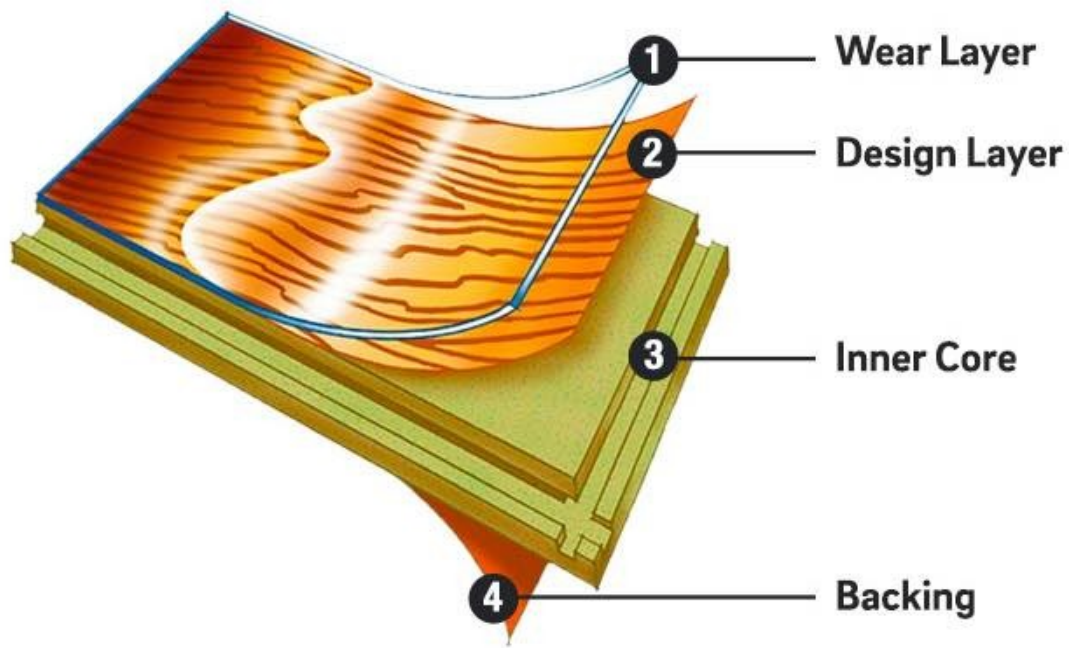
Laminate Floor vs Other Floor Coverings

	Different From Laminate	Similar to Laminate
Vinyl Floor	Vinyl flooring is flexible, contains only vinyl product, and is 100-percent impervious to water. Vinyl flooring does not need to acclimate to a room prior to installation.	Vinyl is a close cousin of laminate. It is competitively priced, equally easy for do-it-yourselfers to install, and has a similar look.
Solid Hardwood	Hardwood is 100-percent solid wood. Laminate has no solid wood. Solid hardwood is thick and can be sanded and re-sanded many times. Laminate is thin and can never be sanded.	Solid hardwood and laminate flooring can look remarkably alike, especially from a distance. High-definition imaging techniques make some laminate flooring a dead-ringer for real hardwood.
Engineered Wood	Engineered wood has a plywood base topped with a veneer of 100-percent real wood. Laminate has no plywood and no natural real wood veneer top.	Both engineered wood and laminate have a base that made of manufactured wood. Both products can look remarkably similar, especially with the premium laminates.
Natural Stone	Laminate flooring contains no stone product. Stone is hard, solid, and thick. Laminate is flexible, breakable, and thin.	As with the hardwood-to-laminate comparison, higher-end laminate flooring can look very much like stone.

Laminate Floor Materials

sometimes people call laminate *wood* floors, though they are wood only in two respects: base material and appearance.

First, the laminate **floor** base consists of pressed chipped **wood** particles. Second, the top has the appearance of real wood due to the accurate image layer—essentially a well-rendered photograph of wood encased in a clear, durable wear layer.



Choice Floors

Aggregated wood particles are subjected to high pressure to form sheets. These sheets have a photorealistic image of wood or stone added to the top, and this image is covered with a wear layer. The wear layer, a durable, thin, clear plastic sheet, is the linchpin between the delicate lower layers and exterior elements such as moisture, UV rays, and scratching.

Laminate Wear Layer

Laminate flooring is a surface layer of two thin sheets of paper impregnated with melamine. This top-most surface layer is a hard transparent type of plastic sheet that is impervious to dogs, chairs, high heels, and other common damaging elements.

Laminate Design Layer

Even when viewed close-up laminate flooring can look realistic. This is due to the laminate's photographic-quality image of real wood underneath the wear layer.

Laminate Base Layer (Core)

Under the wood-grain photograph is about a half-inch of wood-chip composite. Any type of wood chip product is inherently susceptible to water damage. Laminate flooring's base is considered to be dimensionally stable, but only to a certain degree.

Laminate floor Installation Method

Laminate floors install much like [solid hardwood flooring](#) since they have a modified [tongue-and-groove](#) style of joining boards. Yet unlike hardwood flooring, which typically requires professional installation, laminate floors are very easy for the [do-it-yourselfer to install](#) with only basic tools.

Laminate is always a [floating floor](#). This means that it does not have the difficult nail-down [installation issues of hardwood](#) or engineered wood. With the floating floor method, you first roll out inexpensive foam underlayment, tape the underlayment together, and then lay out the laminate planks.

Because the laminate flooring planks are joined from one piece to the next piece and form a heavy single unit, it cannot slide around.

Depending on the type you buy, laminate floor planks are either snapped together or glued together. The snap-together method most commonly used goes under various names such as fold-and-lay or fold-and-lock.

<https://youtu.be/IP7B9B7WX1E>

Unlike the tongue and groove joinery used with solid hardwood, in which one board slides laterally into the adjoining board, fold-and-lay starts with the two boards attached by outer grooves and angled to each other. This folding mechanism serves to bring the two boards imperceptibly closer, tightening the bond, and preventing water migration.

Subfloor and Underlayment

Like all floor coverings, laminate floors need a good, [solid subfloor](#). Foam or felt underlayment resides between the subfloor and laminate, detaching the two surfaces and providing for a softer footfall.

In some instances, when the subfloor is not adequate, an [intervening underlayment](#) of thin plywood may be installed above the subfloor and below the foam underlayment. If the subfloor isn't level, the laminate could have unsightly gaps between boards, so you'll want to make sure the subfloor is even before installation begins.

