

Laminate flooring-Lay it yourself!

In today's trend of homely yet modern design is plenty of space for laminate flooring. The ease of maintenance and hygienic properties of this type of flooring are just two of the reasons that more and more people choose to go 'laminate'. It will be able to give you the feel of a wooden floor, without having to spend bags of money. And nowadays it is so easy to lay it yourself!

With the development of the click-and-go laminates, you really don't need to be a professional to be able to lay your own floor. Which saves you a lot of money! In this guide we will give you a few handy pointers to laying your own laminate floor and how to care for it.

What is laminate flooring?

Laminate is a type of flooring that exists of different layers of material that all have different qualities. From top to bottom, in a typical laminate floor there are: a decorative surface (made of a resin-based melamine that is hard wearing), a wood-based core (which is the main component of a laminate floor), and a backing that is bonded to the underside of the core, which gives it its rigidity.

Laminate flooring comes in all sorts of designs, mainly copying wood patterns and is produced in rectangular plank shape. But recently new designs have been put on the market, imitating slate and tiled flooring. Therefore these laminates have a square shape, but will still have the same main features of laminate flooring, namely durability, ease of maintenance and ease of fitting.

Which flooring to choose?

There are different types of laminate flooring, but both of them work with the tongue-and-groove principle and both of them are 'floating systems', which means that the floor is not attached to the under-floor, but is resting on the under-floor. First of all, there are two methods of putting the floor together: with glue and without glue. Glued flooring is put together by putting a bead of glue between the tongue and the groove. Glueless flooring is a system by which the panels are clicked together and gets more and more popular every day, as it is quicker and cleaner than the glued system. It is also possible to 'unclick' the panels and take them with you when you move.

Laminate flooring comes in a lot of different qualities, thickness and water resistancy. Choose the best flooring you can afford and make sure the flooring you choose is appropriate for the room you're going to put it in. For example, you best use waterproof laminate flooring for the bathroom and the kitchen! Have a look around your local DIY stores, comparing qualities and prices to make sure you make the right choice.

Tools and materials that you will need

- Laminate flooring (!). Be sure you check and double check the size of your room and buy 5% more than you think you need. You will always need more for cutting and nobody likes going back to the DIY shed for one pack of planks! Besides that, when you do return, they might not have your colour match anymore!
- Underlay (to make the floor sound proof and to provide insulation). Take 5% extra of this as well.

- Edging trim (a laminate flooring is not fixed anywhere, edging trim is used to keep it in place along the sides and to provide a neat finish). Take some more of this as well, as you will always have to cut around funny corners you hadn't anticipated.
- Tape measure
- Mask and goggles
- Scissors
- Circular saw/Jigsaw
- Handsaw
- Spirit level
- Square
- Nails/screws etc.

Tools and materials that you might need

When you have a concrete sub-floor:

- Chisel
- Hammer
- Levelling compound
- Bucket
- Damp-proof membrane (for when you have tiles, asphalt/concrete or vinyl as your sub-floor)

When you have a wooden sub-floor:

- Hammer
- Detector for pipes and electricity cables
- Plane (for protruding areas)
- Filler or levelling compound (for holes and hollow areas)
- Pipe covers to neatly finish flooring around pipes

How to start

First of all you have to condition the flooring to the room's temperature and humidity. Leave it in its packing and lay it horizontally (to prevent bending of the laminate) for at least 48 hours before you start to lay it.

Remove all the flooring you will not need anymore (like carpets, etc.). Leave only the sub-floor. You will now have the opportunity to access any under-floor electrics and plumbing, so take it! It will save you a lot of time in the long run.

Determine whether your floor is level enough to start adding the underlay or whether you have to level it out first. **Important!** Not taking enough time to level the floor at this stage will later surface in a number of problems, like bending and warping of the boards and a general unevenness of the floor. This will reduce the enjoyment you will have from your floor and will also shorten its life expectancy. A floor is considered level when difference in height is less than 1mm over a metre.

To level a concrete sub-floor, you will use your hammer and chisel to chip away the protruding areas, and your levelling compound to fill any gaps. However, if they floor is generally not level, it is best to apply the levelling compound over the whole area, which will give a perfectly smooth finish all-over. A damp-proof membrane now has to be put in place according to the composition of the sub-floor.

A wooden sub-floor needs to be checked on protruding nails and loose floorboards. A plane can be used for any uneven boards. Filler for smaller areas and levelling compound for larger areas can be used to even out the floor.

What next?

Put the under-floor down according to the instructions on the packet. As soon as you've done this, check whether the door will clear the final height of your floor by putting a laminate floorboard against the door. If the door gets stuck on the floorboard, now is the moment to remove the door and sand or plane away the excess in order to let the door open properly.

Decide which way you would like to have your floor laid. It is recommended that the floor is laid at a 90° angle across the floorboards (if you have any) in order to reinforce the joints. Another solution might be to first apply a hardboard underfloor to the floorboards. This way it doesn't matter which way you lay your laminate.

Use two spacers in one corner of the room in order to leave a gap between the floorboards and the wall, and lay your first board against it. Make sure it is aligned properly with the wall. Now you can start clicking the boards together until you get to the end of the first row, making sure you use spacers all along the entire wall.

To cut the last board off at the correct point, place the board next to the flooring that is already in place. Make sure you allow for the spacers that need to be placed at the end of the row.

If the cut-off of the last board of the previous row is longer than 300mm, you can use it to start the next row. It is important to create a staggered effect, as the boards shouldn't end at the same place.

It is now easy to click and fit the biggest area of your room, and quite quickly it will look like you're creating something! The only areas you really have to take care of are around doors and pipes. Try to fit your floor as neatly as possible around your door mouldings. You might have to carefully saw into the moulding to ensure a snug fit. Use a laminate floorboard as a guide to show you how much you need to cut away. For pipes you have to measure the distance into the floorboard where the pipes will emerge (taking care to allow for a gap between the boards and the wall). Also measure the width of the pipe. Use a jigsaw to cut out the area around the pipe, starting at the edge of the board. This way you can remove the bit where the pipe will come through the board, and you can replace the bit behind the pipe (using a bit of glue to hold it in place). Use pipe covers to neatly cover around the pipe.

After removing the spacers from around the floor, use edging trim around the room to neatly finish off the floor.

Now you just have to give it a sweep and you're ready!

Top tips

- Have a good look around your local DIY sheds before you commit yourself to a particular type of flooring. Nowadays there are a lot of different

designs and colours available, and there are quite a few offers on laminate flooring, so shop around and get yourself a good deal!

- A shopping list is always a good idea!
- Measure measure measure before you go to your DIY shed. And even then buy about 5% more than you need. Especially if you've never done laminate flooring before it helps if you don't need to worry about mis-cutting a few boards. You don't want to go back for one extra pack just because you couldn't be bothered with it in the first place!
- Always buy the right flooring for the right environment. Check whether the floor will be water resistant when you want to apply it to your kitchen or bathroom.
- Plan any electrical or plumbing work ahead. When you remove your carpet or old floor, you have the easiest access to the wires and pipes under the floorboards, so do it before you lay your new floor!
- Check whether the spacers are included in the pack of floorboards you're buying. They are handy tools to keep your floor in place while you're fitting.
- Take your time while fitting the floor! Although you really want to finish it tonight, deep in your heart you know the floor will look a lot better when you sleep on it and look at it again with fresh eyes the following morning!
- If you decide to go for a glued laminate floor, please keep the drying times in mind. This mainly determines the strength of the flooring.
- If you decide to take the floor with you when you move (only possible with the glueless variant), be careful with unlocking the boards. The tongues snap quite easily if treated roughly.
- Use a special laminate floor cleaner to optimise the shine and durability of your floor. Do not use any abrasive or bleach-based products.