



A Fearless Approach to Epoxy Grout

When durability is paramount, epoxy can't be beat, and with careful prep work, it's not as fussy as you think

BY TOM MEEHAN

For the past 25 years, tilesetters have been relying on epoxy grout as their ace in the hole for grouting stain-prone areas such as countertops, showers, and high-traffic bathroom floors. The early forms of epoxy grout quickly earned the material a reputation for being difficult and messy. I can attest to that fact, too. Epoxy grout used to be tricky to mix and difficult to spread, and the smell always left me feeling sick by day's end. Unless the mixture was perfect, the temperature was fixed, and the moon was in alignment with Saturn and Pluto, the goopy grout would sag in wall joints and settle below the edges of floor tiles. The cleanup, which was unforgiving in every sense of the word, often concluded with my work clothes being tossed in the garbage. If you can approach the material with an open mind, though, I think you will find that today's epoxy-grout products have changed for the better.

Several manufacturers make epoxy grout ("Sources," p. 48), and although their products differ slightly, all have significantly simplified the installation process. The Laticrete product I use is sold in kits, which include individually measured components that ensure the right mix every time. A pair of gloves in each bucket guards against the temptation to work unprotected, packaged additives make cleanup easier, and a fresh sponge means less chance of leaving yellow bits of debris in cured joints. If you throw in your own grout float and heed the advice offered here, a smooth installation is in the bag.

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The kit's a good start



I use Laticrete's SpectraLock Pro epoxy grout ("Sources," below). The kit shown above costs about \$65 and includes most of the materials you need for a smooth installation. Part C (photo left), which adds color, is sold separately. If you choose another brand, make sure to have these essentials.

Bucket

If the epoxy-grout kit doesn't come in a bucket, you will need one. Be sure to wash out remaining grout before using the bucket for cleanup.

Float

Some manufacturers offer special epoxy-grout floats, which are made from a harder rubber. I've found that a premium-quality traditional float (a new one, preferably) is a fine substitute.

Gloves

Epoxy chemicals aren't just messy. They also can irritate your skin. Kits include thin latex gloves, but I prefer slightly thicker grouting gloves.

Mixing tools

I use a margin trowel for mixing small batches of grout, but if the job requires a large portion, I use a drill-powered paddle mixer. Clean tools right after mixing.

Rags

Avoid materials such as terrycloth towels that could leave fuzz in the grout joints; a clean cotton cloth is the best bet.

Sponge

Don't risk being left with yellow sponge crumbs in cured grout joints. Use a new sponge for every installation.

SOURCES

EZpoxy & Hydroment

www.bostik-us.com

Mapei

www.mapei.com

Laticrete

www.laticrete.com

PolyBlend

www.custombuildingproducts.com

EPOXY GROUT NEEDS A WELL-PREPARED SURFACE

Now that the necessary supplies are close at hand, there are a few housekeeping items to check off the list before mixing the epoxy components.

Clean the joints. Use a utility knife or the edge of a margin trowel to remove any hardened chunks of thinset from the tile. Nothing in the joints should be within 1/8 in. of the tile surface.

Vacuum the joint. This step is often skipped, but it's a must. Any dust or small specks of debris left on the floor will appear in the grout joints. The tacky epoxy makes debris difficult to remove before it hardens.

Seal the tile. This is especially important when grouting natural stone (two coats if the stone is extremely porous), but is also a good idea for porcelain and ceramic tile with a flat finish. Allow the sealer to dry for at least a couple of hours.

Protect the area. Don't risk getting this stuff on your bathroom vanity, baseboard trim, door threshold, carpet, or hardwood flooring. Anything that's near the tile but is not supposed to be grouted should be masked off with painter's tape.



ONCE YOU'RE MIXING, THE CLOCK IS TICKING

Expect to have about 80 minutes of working time, but don't try to beat the clock by making only partial batches of grout. If the A:B:C ratio isn't exact, the product won't perform as expected.



Part A



Part B



Part C

Mixing made easy. Combine Part A and Part B in a clean (preferably new) bucket, mixing with a margin trowel and rolling each bag like a tube of toothpaste to squeeze out as much liquid as possible. After stirring, add Part C, the cement-based colorant. Blend all three components until the mixture has a consistency similar to sticky cake batter.

SPREAD QUICKLY, AND CLEAN COMPLETELY

The grouting process for epoxy is basically the same as with conventional grout—pack the joints firmly, but leave as little excess as possible—only the stakes are a bit higher. Work quickly and thoroughly; recklessness will leave you with a mess.

◀ **Scoop, spread, and scrape.** Use the margin trowel to scoop a small pile of grout onto the floor, and begin spreading it across the tile, holding the float at a 30° angle to the floor. Once the grout is pushed firmly into the joints, scrape off the excess, holding the float at a 60° angle to the floor. Be careful not to dig into the side of the joints, or you'll remove the grout.



Don't wait too long to wash. The floor should be ready to wash after about 15 to 20 minutes; much longer than that, and the epoxy begins to harden. Make sure to wring out the sponge thoroughly before scrubbing. Too much water dilutes the epoxy, making it weak and discolored.



Buff away the haze. After both washes have been completed, use a cotton rag to wipe off the remaining haze. Avoid pushing down too hard with the rag; buff the surface firmly, as if you were waxing a car. Don't stop wiping the surface until every bit of sticky residue is removed. If you are working your way out of the room, make sure to watch out for footprints left on the tile surface.