

A successful installation of terra cotta tiles is highly affected by the installation process. Tierra y Fuego strongly recommends hiring or consulting a skilled professional tile installer, even for small projects. Tierra y Fuego is not liable for tile that has been altered from its original state due to improper handling during the installation process. Inspect the tile prior to installation as installation signifies acceptance.

This guide is intended to provide information on frequently asked questions. Opinions vary in the ceramic tile industry about the proper installation of terra cotta tiles.

## Installation Recommendations

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**Note:** Always test a small sample tile with the solutions that might be used during installation before applying to an entire area.

- Carefully choose a skilled tile installer.
- Properly lay out material and strategically mix all boxes of tiles prior to installation.
- Make sure the installer is informed of all the procedures and products; and carefully follows the manufacturer's instructions of any solutions such as sealers, grout releases, and cleaners that may be used or come in contact with the tile during the installation process.
- Apply a grout release (like Aqua Mix's) before grouting following the manufacturer's instructions; this process will help protect its inherent textured surface, and reduce grout staining.
- One important consideration as part of the tile selection process is the color of the grout. Depending on the desired final look, there are three basic approaches to selecting the best grout color: matching, contrasting, and neutral. Grout color will affect the product's final appearance.
- Grout tile with sanded grout for joints greater than 1/4 in. or non-sanded grout for joints smaller than 3/16 in. Premixed epoxy grout is NOT recommended due to its viscosity.
- After the grout has dried completely, clean tiles with Grout Haze Clean-up from Aqua Mix if needed.
- Allow the entire tiled area to dry completely. Depending on environmental climate, it may take up to 24 hours to dry.
- After the installation has been completed, seal grout lines once again with a penetrating sealer.
- If desired and to further protect the tile you may use High Gloss Finish Sealer from Miracle Sealants Company. This surface sealer enhances color while providing resistance to chemicals, stains and dirt.
- As part of a normal maintenance procedure, terra cotta floor tile requires re-sealing. The frequency of re-sealing depends on how the tile has been worn out (Example: Every 1-2 years.)

### **Setting Terra Cotta Tiles:**

Some terra cotta tiles are reasonably smooth and flat, others are so rough that you need to scrape the backs before installing them. If a terra cotta tile is particularly curved, back-butter the concave portion before setting in the mortar. If tiles are not pre-sealed, apply a penetrating sealer before and after installing. If the tiles are installed without having been sealed the mortar and grout will stain the tiles.

The mortar must be wet enough to stick to the tiles, but stiff enough to hold up the tile. If mortar flows out from under the sides of the tiles, stiffen the mix by adding dry ingredients. If the mortar has started to set and will not adhere to the tiles, throw it out and make a new batch.

### **Cutting Terra Cotta Tiles:**

Soft tiles like Saltillo and Spanish Mission Red are too uneven and too thick to cut with a snap cutter. Rent a wet saw if you have more than ten tiles to cut. To cut just a few tiles, clamp a wood guide on the tile and cut with a grinder equipped with a masonry or diamond blade. It will take several passes to cut about halfway through the tile; you can then snap it to finish the cut.

### **Grouting Large Joints:**

Check that the mortar has hardened all the way through before grouting. Because the mortar is so thick, this may take 2 days. Purchase sanded grout. Mix grout that is fairly stiff, just to the point where it does not pour readily. When the spaces between tiles are wide and the tiles are uneven, grouting gets messy. Work the grout in between the tiles by pushing with a grout float in at least two directions at all points. Squeegee away as much of the excess grout as you can. Drag a wet towel over the area, then wipe lightly with a damp sponge. You will need to rinse the sponge often. Once the grout starts to stiffen, use the sponge to create grout lines that are consistent in depth. Allow the grout to harden and then buff the surface with a dry cloth.