

My Florida Home Book 2.5: Taking Care of Indoor Features¹

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Home Surfaces

Flooring: Hard Surfaces

Bamboo

Bamboo flooring is made from fast-growing giant bamboo, which is a grass, not wood. Because it grows so quickly, it is considered an environmentally friendly product.

It comes in different grades that are determined by age, rain, and age at harvest. These and other factors affect the hardness and quality of the material. Bamboo surfaces are becoming more readily available.

Caring for bamboo floors is much the same as for other types of hardwood floors. Keeping it swept and an occasional damp mop is all it really needs.

Ceramic Tile

Ceramic tiles designed for use on floors have a higher hardness rating than those used on walls and are very durable.

Sweep or vacuum floor tiles, then use a damp mop or a household cleaner. Do NOT use cleaners containing alkaline products (ammonia, baking soda) or acid (vinegar).

Grout is the material used to fill the spaces between tiles. To clean unattractive grout use a full strength non-alkaline household cleaner or a powdered cleaner made into a paste. Let stand for five minutes then scrub with a stiff brush. Badly stained or moldy grout can be cleaned with a solution of 1 gallon of water and 3/4 cup of bleach.

If bleach doesn't do the job, you may need to remove and replace the grout. Use a grout-removal tool. After you install new grout, seal it with a grout sealer to protect it from future stains. Reapply sealer once

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every two years. Grout cleaners and sealers can be found in a local hardware store.

Natural Linoleum

Linoleum is made from renewable, biodegradable resources: linseed oil (from crushed flaxseed), pine rosin, clay, cork, limestone, and jute. Natural linoleum is not the same as flooring made of vinyl. Regularly sweep your linoleum floor so dirt will not grind into its surface. Linoleum can be wiped clean with a damp mop.

Vinyl Flooring

Vinyl flooring is made of synthetic chemicals. Vinyl should be swept regularly and can be damp mopped. If dirt will not come up with damp mopping, you can use a few drops of liquid dish detergent in a bucket of warm water.

Laminate Wood Flooring

Laminate wood floors look similar to solid wood floors. However, laminate floors are not made of wood. They are several different materials bonded together.

A damp cloth or mop can be used without damage to the laminate flooring panels, but do not use excessive water. Dry the floor thoroughly with a clean, soft cloth. Do not allow excess liquid to remain on the surface of your laminate floor. Do not use soap-based detergents, abrasive cleaners, or combined "clean and shine" products on your laminate floor.

Concrete

In homes built on a concrete slab, finished concrete can be stained in a variety of colors and patterns, and makes a durable, cool flooring surface. Caring for this type of floor requires damp mopping. This type of flooring is not available for wood frame homes not built on a slab.

Wood Flooring

A wood floor is made of solid wood or layers of wood.

Do not use water on natural finished wood floors. Sweep or dust mop the floor regularly. Wipe up spills immediately with a soft cloth. Clean your wood floors periodically with a professional wood floor cleaning product recommended by the manufacturer of your particular hardwood floor product. Not doing so may void any warranty or guarantee on the product.

If possible, do not wear heavy shoes or high heels on hardwood floors, as some heels can cause dents. Never drag furniture or other objects across a wood floor. Install floor mats at each entrance to avoid tracking in dirt from the bottoms of shoes.

Terrazzo

Terrazzo is made of marble and poured cement. Terrazzo is a very durable surface sometimes found in older homes. However, it is somewhat porous and can stain easily; therefore, it is recommended that a penetrating sealant be applied to the floor. Penetrating sealants can be found in local hardware stores or home improvement centers.

Sweep or dust your floor regularly. For cleaning, do NOT use a solution that contains alkaline products such as ammonia or baking soda, or acid products such as vinegar. For best results, use a commercial cleaner made especially for terrazzo. All-purpose household cleaners, soaps, detergents and wax removers usually contain one or more alkalis, and should not be used on terrazzo floors. Carefully and regularly maintaining this type of floor protects it for many years.

Flooring: Soft Surfaces

Carpet

Carpets should be vacuumed weekly to remove dirt. High traffic areas, such as places where children and pets play, may need daily vacuuming.

Remove stains immediately. Blot or absorb liquid stains. Do not rub them because you may spread the stain. Work from the outer edge toward center of the stained area. Dry the wet area by blotting. If a stain remover is needed, test it on a small area of carpet in an inconspicuous area.

Carpets should be steam cleaned when heavily soiled. Be sure the carpet is completely dry before walking

on it. Try to steam clean when it is not too humid outside, so you can open windows to air out the room.

Cork

Cork floors are made from the cork material harvested from the outer barks of trees. Natural cork flooring materials are different from the cork-vinyl composite floor tile. Cork-vinyl products have a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) backing, a cork inner layer and a vinyl surface layer.

Keep the cork floor surface free of dirt and grit through regular dusting with a dry mop or cloth. Damp mop when needed, but use a well wrung damp mop. Clean up spills and excess water immediately. Never flood the floor surface with any liquid or use harsh abrasive cleaners.

Cabinets

Painted wood, laminate, melamine, or faux wood-grain surfaces can usually be cleaned with a mild detergent and warm water solution. Rinse with a cloth or sponge dampened in clean water. Using a dry cloth or paper towel to wipe the surface dry prevents streaking. Most all-purpose household cleaners may also be used; read the label to be sure it can be used on that surface, and follow directions exactly. Test inside a door to be sure it will not harm the finish.

Natural finished wood cabinets may be cleaned with a variety of commercial products, usually sprays, made for this purpose. Read the label to be sure it can be used on the finish, and follow directions exactly. These have a solvent base, so read and carefully follow cautions about ventilation, and make sure there is no spark or flame or pilot light burning in the area that could cause a fire. Dispose of cloths used in a tightly sealed container, again not near a spark or flame. Test inside a door to be sure the cleaner will not harm the finish before starting on other surfaces; they can damage some.

Countertops

- Protect the counter top with a cutting board when using a knife. Scratch marks provide areas for germs to collect.

- Clean counter tops daily with a soft cloth that has been dipped in hot soapy water, then rinse and dry.
- If your countertop is not completely smooth, you may need to use a brush with hot soapy water to clean the indentations.
- Use a few drops of liquid chlorine bleach or baking soda to remove stains from kitchen counters.
- DO NOT use abrasive cleaners. They scratch the surface and make it harder to clean.

Appliances and Home Equipment

Appliances and home equipment can be costly to purchase, but they can be even more costly to operate and maintain throughout their life span.

Think about your needs now and into the future. Do you need an appliance with many features that you don't understand and aren't likely to use? Do you need appliances that can be reached from a wheel chair? Will your children be able to reach the dials or touch pads of the appliance?

Compare models and prices. Before choosing appliances, look at a minimum of three models in at least two or three stores or dealers. Pay attention to the yellow energy label to know how much energy the appliance uses. Choosing a more energy efficient appliance can save many dollars over the life of the appliance. Think carefully about your choice before you make the buy.

When a major appliance is installed, be sure it has been carefully balanced on the floor to operate properly. If not, call the installer to come and adjust it. Make sure you have been given the care manual. Store the care manual in a place where you can easily locate it when you need to refer to it. There should be a registration card with the care manual. Fill in the card and return it to the address listed on the card. This records the date your warranty starts and will be useful if you have a problem with the appliance.

Read and file your appliance or equipment warranty. It is important to use all the features of this piece of equipment during the warranty period several

times. By doing this you will learn if all features are working properly. Any failures can be corrected during the warranty period, but usually not afterward.

Make a file for each appliance or major piece of household equipment. Include information on how to contact the dealer for authorized service, warranty information and all bills for service.

Refrigerator/Freezer

When you get a new refrigerator/freezer, fill out the warranty card and return it to the address printed on the card. The warranty will tell you what parts and service the warranty covers and for how long.

Test Your New Refrigerator

Try out all parts and features of your new appliance soon after it is installed. Is it cooling properly? Do the doors close properly? Does it operate quietly? Most defects due to manufacturing occur when the appliance is new and can be repaired while the refrigerator is still under warranty.

Care

Keeping the refrigerator clean is important for several reasons including keeping food safe, keeping the appliance fresh smelling and operating properly. Keeping a refrigerator clean begins with how food is stored.

- Cover foods tightly to keep them from drying out and to keep odors from mixing with other foods to cause "off flavors."
- Avoid spills in the refrigerator. Wipe up spills right away. Small amounts of food left in cracks and crevices will lead to "off flavors" and cause bacteria (germs) to grow.

Manual refrigerator/freezers should be defrosted regularly by:

- Turning off the refrigerator (unplug if necessary)
- Removing all foods
- Placing pans of hot water in the freezer section to melt the ice that has accumulated

- When ice and frost is gone, wash the inside of the refrigerator and freezer with a solution of 2 tablespoons of baking soda and 4 cups of warm water. The baking soda will reduce strong odors.
- Rinse with clear warm water and dry with a soft cloth. Turn on (or plug in) the refrigerator.
- Wipe off all jars and dishes as you replace them in the refrigerator.

Frost-free refrigerators must also be cleaned regularly.

- Wash the outside of the refrigerator with sudsy water (using hand dishwashing detergent), rinse, and dry. Wash the gaskets around the refrigerator doors. Never let them become sticky, as sticky gaskets can cause air leaks costing you more energy over time.
- Vacuum the dust off the condenser coils, usually on the back of the refrigerator, or under it. Dirty, dusty coils make the refrigerator work harder to cool and use more energy, therefore costing you more money.
- Once or twice each year, remove and clean the "pan" or plastic tray at the very bottom of the refrigerator that collects the condensation or defrost water. Look in your care manual to find where this "pan" is located. Dust and moisture in this "pan" can cause mold to grow and can cause health problems for people with allergies.

Service

- If your refrigerator/freezer is not cooling, check the following before calling for a service professional.
- Is it plugged in? Is the plug firmly in place?
- Is the circuit tripped at the circuit box? If so, turn it back on.
- Use a kitchen thermometer to check temperatures. The refrigerator should be between 33 and 40 F. The freezer should be 10 F or below. Some of the less energy efficient appliances may not reach zero degrees.

- If foods are not cold (frozen in the freezer compartment), keep the doors closed and call for service. Read your care manual to see if there is a 24-hour "override" to cool the appliance until a service professional is able to come to your home. Try not to open the refrigerator until the repair has been made.
- If foods are beginning to thaw and are getting warm, try to save them. See if you can move them to a friend or neighbor's house or put foods in a cooler with ice. Cook foods that are still in good condition and can be eaten within a short time.
- If foods have spoiled, throw the foods away and clean the refrigerator. Leave the doors open while waiting for service.
- Make a list of the foods that have spoiled and their cost. If the refrigerator is under warranty, this information will be important to report to the company.

When you call for service, have the make and model number ready.

- Manufacturer: _____
- Phone Number: _____
- Model Number: _____
- Serial Number: _____
- Dealer or Authorized Service: _____
- Phone Number: _____

Always ask for a receipt for repairs, even if the appliance is under warranty and there is no cost for repair. Keep receipts in case the refrigerator has a similar problem in the future.

Oven, Stove, Range, Cook Top

When you look at the many choices of ovens, stoves, cooking ranges and/or cook top surfaces for your home, there are so many from which to choose. One of the first decisions must be a choice of electric or gas. Some communities do not have access to natural or propane gas, so an electric range may be

the only choice. These appliances typically last for many years. Choose wisely.

Care

- Care for your appliance by wiping spills immediately.
- Read the care manual for specific cleaning instructions.
- Use the gentlest (least abrasive) cleaner first.
- Never use flammable liquids to clean a heating appliance.
- Do not store items in your oven that you do not intend to bake.
- Use appropriate cookware for the heating element.
- Never use the appliance if it is not working properly.

Service

When you call for service, have the make and model number ready to give to the repair company.

- Manufacturer: _____
- Phone Number: _____
- Model Number: _____
- Serial Number: _____
- Dealer or Authorized Service: _____
- Phone Number: _____

Microwave Ovens

Microwave ovens are appliances that use light rays, produced by a magnetron tube to produce heat, thereby cooking food and liquids. When purchasing a microwave oven, look for the size oven you desire and the power you need. The greater the wattage, the more power and the faster food cooks. Also, look for the features you will use. Learn to use all the features your appliance may have, such as defrost cycles, variable power, or delayed start features.

- Never cover foods with aluminum foil or cook them in a metal container as that will cause the oven to arc and possibly damage it.
- Use detergent and water to clean the oven.
- Food particles can be removed from the inside of the oven by heating a cup of water for two minutes, removing the cup and then wiping the inside walls of the oven with a soft, damp cloth.
- Never leave cooking food unattended.

Dishwasher

Review the many choices of dishwashers before making your selection. Read the energy label to choose one that will use the least amount of energy to save money over time. Select one that uses less water. Look at the features and choose those that are right for your family. Look at the dishwasher racks and silverware holder. Are they right for the dishes and glassware that you own?

Always run a **full** dishwasher load. This will save water, energy, and money. Always use the appropriate dishwasher detergent. High-sudsing detergents used for hand washing dishes can damage your dishwasher. Inspect the hoses leading to the dishwasher periodically to check for cracks or leaks. Replace the hoses when necessary.

Garbage Disposer/Disposal

Select a garbage disposer that will meet your needs. Is it a size and shape that will fit well below your sink? Does it have enough horsepower to handle food scraps, citrus peels, and small bones?

Here's how to keep the garbage disposal running smoothly:

- Keep hard objects out. It should not handle plastic, metal, some bones and gristle.
- Run a strong stream of cold water when grinding food waste. Ample water will make sure the waste passes into the sewer and doesn't clog your drain lines.

- Let water run a few seconds after the disposal finishes grinding, to flush the drain.
- Do not let food stand in the disposal. This may cause the disposal to corrode and produce odors.
- Clean the blades of the disposal by grinding citrus peels or by sprinkling a dozen or more ice cubes with baking soda and grinding them up in the disposal. Flush with ample water.
- Do not use chemical drain cleaners in the garbage disposal. These will damage the disposal unit.

Here's what to do if the disposal stops:

- **If the motor is humming**, turn the disposal unit off. Turn the cold water on. If your model comes with an allen wrench, insert it in a hole in the bottom of the unit. Turn the wrench until the grinder blades turn easily.
- Once you have gotten the grinder blades turning easily, you may turn on the disposal again.
- **NEVER** put your hand in the garbage disposal.
- **If the motor is not humming**, press the "reset" button on the bottom of the garbage disposal unit under the sink. If this does not work immediately, wait a minute and try again.
- **If the disposal is noisy**, it may mean that there is a hard object, like a spoon or tool that has fallen into the garbage disposal. Turn off the disposal unit. Use long handled tongs or pliers to reach into the disposal and remove the object.
- **NEVER** put your hand in the garbage disposal.

Laundry Appliances

Major laundry appliances usually include a clothes washer and clothes dryer.

When purchasing laundry appliances, look for the yellow energy label to determine which appliance uses the least energy. This will save you money.

Look for the features that are right for your family. Do you need several wash cycles or water levels? What about extra, heavy-duty capacity? Do not invest in features your family is not likely to use.

Laundry appliances come in different sizes, heights and surface finishes. Choose what is right for the space in your home and the needs of your family members.

As in purchasing other appliances, always compare at least three different brands and appliance centers to determine the best options for your family.

Clothes washing appliances require outlets for water and electricity. Clothes dryers require either gas or electricity to operate. If your home has access to natural or propane gas, you may have a choice, otherwise electric clothes dryer are the only option.

Select a clothes dryer with the features that your family requires. You may need one with more than one heating temperature depending upon the fabrics you will be drying. Generally, you will need a lower temperature setting for fine fabrics and synthetics (such as nylon and polyester) and a higher temperature for jeans and work clothes.

Laundry appliances often have "lint traps" that collect the small fibers or dust from your clothes and fabrics. Find the "lint trap" and check it after every load. Removing the lint is easy, will make the appliances more efficient, and reduce the risk of your dryer overheating.

Always protect the interior surface of your laundry appliances by not placing clothing with heavy buckles or sharp objects that may cause the surface to chip or become damaged. Rough interior surfaces can damage subsequent loads of clothing throughout the life of the appliance.