

## Countertop Guide

Replacing a kitchen or bathroom countertop can be a relatively inexpensive part of a total remodeling job, costing as little as \$5.00 per square foot of do-it-yourself laminate countertop. Custom Laminate countertops start around \$20 a square foot. You can also spend over \$100 on costlier materials. Whichever material you choose ask about any additional costs you may incur, delivery, taxes, installation etc. Although some materials are very difficult to scratch and burn, we recommend the use of cutting boards and hot pads to keep any countertop looking it's best.

### Getting started

The budget comes first. Use this buying guide and the Ratings to find out the pros and cons of the materials you're considering, especially since some materials are close in price. You have more choices of materials, colors, and patterns than ever, and some materials such as quartz, granite, limestone, marble, and even stainless steel are migrating from the kitchen to the bathroom. Bathroom counters, which include Cultured Marble (actually a resin) typically see a lot less wear and tear than kitchen counters, but consider materials that are more likely to resist stains and chips, unless the counter is for a powder room or guest bathroom.

### What about the sink?

A top-mounted sink can be used with any countertop material and is dropped in after the counter is installed. An under-mount sink is placed under the countertop and works best with materials such as granite, quartz, solid surfacing, or stainless steel. Some materials, such as solid surfacing, can be used for both the sink and counter, creating a seamless look.

### Ways to save

Consider mixing materials, using the more expensive material on prominent areas such as an island and a less expensive material on the perimeter. Buying remnants are a possibility for smaller areas, such as an island, pastry slab, or bathroom counter, and you could mix and match remnants for bigger areas. Beveled and bull-nosed edges add style, but will boost cost. Rounded edges are safer than squared edges, and may not cost extra. Rynone Kitchen & Bath has a large warehouse with budget conscious leftover laminate countertops, sinks, vanity tops and other materials for the do-it-yourself homeowner.

## Types

These tests stained, sliced, scratched, scorched, and nicked 14 materials from leading brands and found huge differences in materials. But there was little difference among competing brands, except for recycled glass, and that's why they've rate materials, not brands.

### Quartz



Also known as engineered stone, quartz is a blend of stone chips, resins, and pigments and is ideal for areas that get plenty of use and abuse. It comes in an array of vibrant colors and styles that mimic stone. Many manufacturers have multiple levels of pricing. You may want to choose more than one color or manufacturer to quote to find one that best fits your budget.

#### **Pros:**

Quartz survived a gauntlet of spills, hot pots, knives, and more with top scores, and it doesn't have to be sealed for stain protection. At Rynone Kitchen and Bath your quote will include a free under-mount sink, templating, delivery and installation.

#### **Cons:**

Some patterns can appear unnaturally uniform, although manufacturers are trying for a more random look closer to natural stone. Edges and corners can chip and only a pro can repair them--rounded edges help.

## Granite



Each slab of this natural material is unique. It remains popular and is a good choice for heavily-used areas and can be used with an under-mounted sink.

### **Pros:**

Like quartz, granite survived spills, hot pots, knives, and more with top scores. At Rynone Kitchen and Bath your quote will include a free under-mount sink, templating, delivery and installation.

### **Cons:**

Edges and corners can chip and you'll need a pro to repair them. Granite requires an easy to do sealing every year or so for stain protection.

## Laminates



Laminate generally consists of layers of paper or fabric impregnated with resin over composition wood, and is much better looking than it used to be thanks to new printing technology and decorative edges. Laminate is available in hundreds of cool patterns and interesting colors, many mimic natural granites and other stones. Laminates are inexpensive and relatively easy to install. Use in areas of heavy use but minimal abuse. Laminates may show seams on the front edge and between the backsplash and counter, but Formica and Wilson Art offer decorative edges that replace the dark line along the edge of the counter. Another option is post-forming, a process that uses heat to form and bend laminate sheets, making them look continuous and without seams.

### **Pros:**

Laminates excelled at resisting stains, impact, and heat; they also withstand abrasive pads nicely. They're easy to clean, relatively easy to install, and are great for a tight budget.

### **Cons:**

Sitting water can seep through seams weakening the material beneath or causing lifting. Laminate can be scratched and nicked and can't be repaired--so use a cutting board. Textured finishes which often mimic natural stone are better than flat finishes at hiding imperfections.

## Tile



Ceramic tile comes in a wide selection of colors and patterns. It mixes nicely with other materials and works well on a backsplash or island top.

### **Pros:**

Tile is relatively easy to install. It offers excellent heat resistance, so it's a good choice around stoves. Buying a few extra tiles allows you to repair localized damage easily, one tile at a time.

### **Cons:**

The grout is likely to stain even when it's sealed although darker grout can help, and tile edges and corners can chip.

## Solid Surface



Made of polyester or acrylic resins combined with mineral fillers, this material imitates concrete, marble, and other types of stone, as well as quartz (an imitation of an imitation). Solid surfacing can be used for counters, sink, and backsplash, creating a seamless look since the joints are almost invisible.

### **Pros:**

Resistance to heat and impact are pluses, and scratches and small nicks can be buffed out and repaired. The material is waterproof, so it's a good choice for an under-mount sink.

### **Cons:**

Solid surfacing scratches and cuts easily.

## Butcher block



These countertops add warmth to any kitchen. Maple is common, but there are other woods, including teak.

### **Pros:**

This material is useful for food preparation such as chopping and slicing. It's relatively easy to install and repair.

### **Cons:**

Damage from heat, cuts, scrapes, and impacts make for high maintenance. Butcher block countertops must be treated regularly with mineral oil or beeswax. Varnished butcher block was extremely stain-resistant, but terrible at everything else. Butcher block with an oil finish was better at resisting heat, but stains spread and were impossible to remove. Fluctuations in humidity affect wood, making butcher block a poor choice for over a dishwasher or around a sink.

## Soapstone



It's beautiful and not as common as granite.

### **Pros:**

Best for adding the beauty of stone to a low-traffic kitchen. It withstands heat very well and small scratches can be repaired. Slabs vary, visit a stone yard and pick the piece you love.

### **Cons:**

But it's easily sliced, scratched, and nicked. Stain resistance is so-so and it needs to be periodically rubbed with mineral oil.

## Ultracompact



This is a new countertop category and we tested Dekton, so far. It's a combination of quartz, porcelain, and glass, according to the manufacturer.

### **Pros:**

Dekton resisted damage from heat, stains, chopping and cutting and was very good at resisting abrasion.

**Cons:** Please note, our suppliers have had numerous problems with this material and we no longer sell it

In our impact tests pieces of the edges chipped off and Dekton cracked into two pieces on samples that were 2 centimeters thick, the manufacturer-recommended thickness. These tests simulate what could happen if a heavy pot fell from a shelf or pot rack up to 2 feet above the counter.

## Concrete



Concrete countertops can provide a unique look as this material is typically custom-formed by local fabricators. Quality can vary greatly.

**Pros:**

Concrete can be tinted and textured and can include stone chips.

**Cons:**

It chips and scratches easily and can develop hairline cracks. Topical sealers can protect against stains but not heat; penetrating sealers can handle heat, but not stains.

## Stainless steel



It lets you integrate countertops in a kitchen with stainless appliances for a sleek, commercial kitchen look. Stainless can be welded, ground, and buffed to get rid of seams.

**Pros:**

Resistance to heat and stains is a plus.

**Cons:**

Steel dents and scratches easily and shows fingerprints. Drain cleaners and hard-water deposit removers can discolor steel.

## Marble



Beautiful and classic, marble has been used in European kitchens for ages. To some, marble takes on a patina, but others will see it as marred.

### Pros:

Small nicks and scratches can be polished out.

### Cons:

Marble chips and scratches easily and you'll need to seal periodically to protect from staining. Most stains that marred unsealed marble wiped away with water on sealed samples, but hard-water deposit removers left a permanent mark, even on sealed stone.

## Bamboo



While bamboo may be eco-friendly, it isn't user-friendly.

### Pros:

Best for show rather than daily use. It's available in several styles, including a parquet pattern.

### Cons:

But it's easily stained, scorched, sliced, and nicked. Ask if you can use near a sink because moisture can warp it, and note that bamboo may darken over

## Limestone



Limestone provides a stone look without heavy veining. It's attractive but impractical, so consider it for low-traffic areas.

### Pros:

Limestone resists heat well.

**Cons:**

Scratches and dings from our dropped 5-pound weight marred the surface of this soft, porous stone, and even a high-quality sealer didn't protect against stains. Eleven of the 20 substances we applied left stains still visible after they were left on the surface for just 24 hours.  
time.