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Remodeling

Perk Up Your Kitchen

Breathe new life into your kitchen with these flooring options.

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Appliances and cabinetry hog the spotlight in the kitchen. But in a busy household, the flooring has to hold up under heavy use and look good, too. You have plenty of options for replacing worn or outdated floors for \$1,000 or less. Whether you can reduce the cost by doing the work yourself depends on the type of flooring, your skill level, your ability to recognize inadequate subflooring, and whether you can remove and dispose of old flooring (some older floorings contain asbestos).

Hardwood (\$9 to \$22 per square foot, installed) is an expensive option, but it gives a kitchen visual warmth and ensures resale appeal. To cut costs, buy prefinished (no staining, sanding and sealing in your home) solid boards or engineered hardwood -- veneer over laminated wood. The thicker the board or the veneer, the longer the floor will last and the more opportunity you'll have to refinish it when necessary. Do-it-yourselfers should check out engineered wood that interlocks and "floats" (it doesn't require nailing, stapling or gluing). One good choice: Bruce Engineered Cherry Hardwood (at Lowe's, \$106 per carton, covering 22.5 square feet).

Bamboo (\$12 to \$28 per square foot, installed), widely touted as a "green" alternative to hardwood, is only as environmentally friendly as the processes used to harvest and manufacture it. Those practices affect durability, too. Look for products made with plantation-grown, mature bamboo and with glues containing low-emission formaldehyde or a water-based solvent. One version of Teragren's Synergy, with a layer of bamboo on top of a cross-ply, bamboo core, comes interlocking and prefinished (available in flooring showrooms for \$7 to \$9 per square foot, product only).

Ceramic (\$3 to \$20 per square foot, installed) is beautiful and durable. But it can be hard on your feet and unforgiving when dishes or glasses are dropped on it. Choose a tile that's durable enough for kitchen use and water-resistant. Unglazed tile is less slippery but requires sealing to prevent stains. Unless you're prepared to assess and correct the subfloor (the tiles are liable to crack if the floor beneath them is flexible) and cut, lay and grout tiles, leave this job to an installer.

Linoleum (\$7 to \$10 per square foot, installed) can last 40 years or more. Made from linseed oil, pine rosin, wood flour, limestone and pigments with a jute backing, a surface scratch merely reveals more of the same. Linoleum comes in both sheet and tile forms. Marmoleum Click, in interlocking panels and squares, has a cork backing and comes in 24 colors.