



NATURAL STONE TOPS CARE

CARE AND PRECAUTIONS

Use coasters under all glasses, particularly those containing alcohol or citrus juices. Many common foods contain acids that can dull or etch the surface of many stones or even cause staining in sealed stones. Use trivets or mats under hot dishes and placemats under china, ceramics, silver, or other objects that can scratch the surface. Granite pros determine the need for reapplication of the sealing:

- Perform the Lemon Juice Test.
- See Sealing Granite for specific details on sealing.

CLEANING PROCEDURES

The simplest means of caring for granite is cleaning. Clean stone surfaces with a neutral cleaner, stone soap, or mild dish-washing detergent and warm water. Too much cleaner or soap may leave a film. Do not use products that contain lemon, vinegar, or other acids on marble or other calcareous stones. Rinse the surface thoroughly after washing it with soap. Do not use scouring powders or creams; these products contain abrasives that may scratch the stone. Tops may need to have a penetrating sealer applied.

Check with your installer for recommendations. As a fabricator and installer, we always degreased countertops and gave them their final cleaning with denatured alcohol. Denatured alcohol does wonders for cleaning granite and cutting through film buildup on your counters. The result is the original shiny surface. See Cleaning Granite Tops.

KNOW YOUR STONE

Natural stone can be classified into two general categories depending on its composition:

- Siliceous stone is composed mainly of silica or quartz-like particles. It tends to be very durable and relatively easy to clean with mild acidic cleaning solutions. Examples of siliceous stones include granite, slate, sandstone, quartzite, and bluestone.
- Calcareous stone is composed mainly of calcium carbonate. It is sensitive to acidic cleaning products and may require different cleaning procedures than siliceous stone. Examples of calcareous stones include marble, travertine, limestone, and onyx.

SPILLS AND STAINS

Blot the spill with a paper towel immediately. Don't wipe the area, or it will spread the spill. Flush the area with plain water and mild soap and rinse several times. Dry the area with a soft cloth. Repeat as necessary. If the stain remains, refer to the following sections in this guide. See Granite Stain Removal.



TYPES OF STAINS AND CLEANING ACTIONS NEEDED

- **OIL-BASED (GREASE, TAR, COOKING OIL, MILK, COSMETICS)**
 - An oil-based stain will darken the stone and typically must be chemically dissolved so the source of the stain can be flushed away. Clean gently with a soft, liquid cleanser with bleach, household detergent, ammonia, acetone, or mineral spirits.
- **ORGANIC (COFFEE, TEA, FRUIT, TOBACCO, PAPER, FOOD, URINE, LEAVES)**
 - It may cause a pinkish-brown stain and may disappear after the source is removed. Clean with 12% hydrogen peroxide (hair bleaching strength) and a few drops of ammonia.
- **METAL (IRON RUST, COPPER, BRONZE)**
 - Iron or rust stains are orange to brown in color and follow the shape of the staining object. Copper and bronze stains appear green or muddy-brown and result from the action of moisture on nearby embedded bronze, copper, or brass items. Metal stains must be removed with a poultice. (See the section on Making & Using a Poultice). Deep-seated, rusty stains are extremely difficult to remove, and the stone may be permanently stained.
- **BIOLOGICAL (ALGAE, MILDEW, LICHENS, MOSS, FUNGI)**
 - Clean with dilute (1/2 cup in a gallon of water) ammonia, bleach, or hydrogen peroxide. Do NOT mix bleach and ammonia! This combination produces a toxic and lethal gas.
- **INK (MAGIC MARKER, PEN, INK)**
 - Clean with bleach or hydrogen peroxide (light-colored stone only!) or lacquer thinner or acetone (dark stones only!)

TYPES OF STAINS AND CLEANING ACTIONS NEEDED (CONTINUED)

- **PAINT**

- Small amounts can be removed with lacquer thinner or scraped off carefully with a razor blade. Heavy paint coverage should be removed only with commercial “heavy liquid” paint stripper available from hardware stores and paint centers. These strippers normally contain caustic soda or lye. Do not use acids or flame tools to strip paint. Paint strippers can etch the stone surface. Follow the manufacturer’s directions to flush the area thoroughly with clean water. Protect yourself with rubber gloves and eye protection. Work only in well-ventilated areas. Normally, latex or acrylic paint will not cause staining. Oil-based paints, linseed oil, putty, caulks, and sealants may cause oily stains.

- **SCRATCHES AND NICKS**

- Surface scratches may be buffed with dry ‘0000’ steel wool. Deeper scratches and nicks should be repaired and re-polished by a professional.

- **MAKING AND USING A POULTICE**

- Sometimes stone top care requires removing stains with a poultice. A poultice is a liquid cleaner or chemical mixed with a white absorbent material to form a paste about the consistency of peanut butter. The poultice is spread over the stained area to a thickness of about ½” with a wood or plastic spatula, covered with plastic, and left to work for 24 to 48 hours. The liquid cleaner or chemical will draw out the stain into the absorbent material. Poultice procedures may need to be repeated to completely remove a stain.

- **POULTICE MATERIALS**

- Poultice materials include kaolin, fuller’s earth, whiting, diatomaceous earth, powdered chalk, white molding plaster, or talc. Approximately one pound of prepared poultice material will cover one square foot. Do not use whiting or iron-type clays such as fuller’s earth with acid chemicals. The reaction will cancel the effect of the poultice. A poultice can also be prepared using white cotton balls, white paper towels, or gauze pads.

CLEANING AGENTS BY STAIN TYPE

- **OIL-BASED STAINS**

- Poultrice with baking soda and water or one of the powdered poultice materials and mineral spirits.

- **ORGANIC STAINS**

- Poultrice with one of the powdered poultice materials and 12% hydrogen peroxide (hair bleaching strength), or use acetone instead of the hydrogen peroxide.

- **IRON STAINS**

- Poultrice with diatomaceous earth and a commercially available rust remover. Rust stains are particularly difficult to remove and may require a professional.

- **COPPER STAINS**

- Poultrice with one of the powdered poultice materials and ammonia.

- **BIOLOGICAL STAINS**

- Poultrice with dilute ammonia, bleach, or hydrogen peroxide. Do NOT mix bleach and ammonia! This combination produces a toxic and lethal gas.

- **APPLYING THE POULTICE**

- Prepare the poultice. If using powder, mix the cleaning agent or chemical to a thick paste the consistency of peanut butter. If using paper, soak in the chemical and let drain. Don't let the liquid drip. Wet the stained area with distilled water. Apply the poultice to the stained area about ¼ to ½ inch thick and extend the poultice beyond the stained area by about one inch. Use a wood or plastic scraper to spread the poultice evenly. Cover the poultice with plastic and tape the edges to seal it. Allow the poultice to dry for about 24 to 48 hours.
- The drying process pulls the stain out of the stone and into the poultice material. After about 24 hours, remove the plastic and allow the poultice to dry. Remove the poultice from the stain. Rinse with distilled water and buff dry with a soft cloth. Use the wood or plastic scraper, if necessary, to lift the poultice off the stain. Repeat the poultice application if the stain is not removed. It may take up to five applications for difficult stains.