



flooring² LUXURY VINYL

What is Luxury Vinyl Plank (LVP) and Luxury Vinyl Tile (LVT) Flooring?

What are the Pros and Cons of LVP and LVT.



Luxury Vinyl flooring has skyrocketed in popularity as the go-to floor covering choice not just for moisture-prone areas like kitchens and bathrooms, but for common areas, such as living rooms, halls, and bedrooms.

Luxury Vinyl flooring textures and visuals have become so realistic they virtually resemble the look of a real hardwood or ceramic tile floor at a much better price. Luxury Vinyl floors are waterproof and provide a simple “do-it-yourself” installation option. Many buyers who previously would have avoided installing vinyl floors in their homes are recognizing the value of Luxury Vinyl flooring.

In short, Luxury Vinyl flooring's time has arrived. But is it right for you and your home?

What Is Luxury Vinyl Plank and Luxury Vinyl Tile flooring?

At its core, Luxury Vinyl Plank (LVP), is simply vinyl flooring that comes in long, narrow strips offering the appearance of real wood flooring.

At its core, Luxury Vinyl Tile (LVT), is simply vinyl flooring that comes in various size tiles offering the appearance of real ceramic tile flooring.

LUXURY VINYL PLANK (LVP)

Luxury Vinyl Plank (LVP) manufacturers have produced large format boards that give the home a certain, distinctive wood plank floor appearance. Also, these larger boards make installation easier because there are fewer boards to lay.

- Length: Boards typically are 36 - 48 inches long. As a note of comparison, authentic wood plank flooring ranges in lengths from 4 feet to 8 feet.
- Width: Luxury Vinyl Plank flooring, widths will vary considerably. Widths are commonly in the 6 - 7 3/4-inch range; some go up to 9 inches wide and 60 inches long. *Five inches or more is typically the width of authentic wood plank flooring.

Luxury Vinyl Plank flooring now offers deeper embossing and better graphics, rendering it a closer simulation of wood and stone than previous iterations of luxury vinyl flooring.

Features of Quality Luxury Vinyl Plank

Today, the most sought-after Luxury Vinyl flooring is referred to as “Rigid-Core” Luxury Vinyl flooring. It is commonly 4mm (0.16”) to 8mm (0.32’) thick.

The first-generation luxury vinyl floors are much thinner ranging from 2mm (0.079”) to 4mm (0.16”) solid vinyl construction products that had a much higher rate of expansion and contraction when not properly installed. This caused separation of the planks leaving a very unpleasant visual appearance.

Along with graphics, surface embossing is the quality that makes luxury vinyl planks look more like real wood planks.

If you hold the product to an angle, you see how deeply the surface is embossed. This texture provides a realistic wood look. This is paradoxical, though, because real wood flooring does not always have texture. One goal of sanding down and re-finishing real hardwood floors is to bring down the texture and create a smooth surface once again.

You can even find luxury vinyl plank with a heavily antiqued or distressed look, hand-scraped, dinged, scratched, and peppered with nail holes. But you need to go thicker for this because thinner vinyl boards are physically impossible to emboss that deeply.

Price Ranges: Moderate to High

Rarely, if ever, will luxury vinyl plank floor reach the level of actual *wood* plank prices. After all, lower prices are one of the major reasons why homeowners go the direction of luxury vinyl plank, as opposed to the real, organic wood product. So, luxury vinyl plank runs as much as five or ten times less expensive than wood plank.

Luxury vinyl tile prices are comparable to ceramic/porcelain tile. However, with ceramic tile, you must factor in the cost of additional materials (thinset and grout), installation, or the cost of tile-specific tools. Luxury vinyl tile requires no mortar or grout, and most of the tools are ordinary shop tools. Laminate flooring and luxury vinyl flooring are in the same, relative price range.

Pros

- Luxury vinyl plank or tile flooring is easy to self-install.
- Some vinyl plank flooring is inexpensive.
- Floating floor installation means that it does not need to be attached to the subfloor.

Cons

- Thin luxury vinyl flooring has little or no embossing.
- Luxury vinyl flooring can be hard to walk on since it has no cushioning.
- Many home buyers still view luxury vinyl as poorer quality flooring.
- Being a vinyl product, many luxury vinyl floors will not perform in direct sunlight. The sun will cause the planks/tiles to expand excessively creating warped planks/tiles.
- It MUST be installed correctly for the planks or tiles to remain connected.

Luxury vinyl floors can scratch easily if proper care is not taken.

What About Inexpensive Luxury Vinyl flooring?

Luxury vinyl flooring in the rock-bottom pricing range can be found at commodity flooring retailers. This type of luxury vinyl is usually installed in workshops, laundry rooms, rental apartments, and other areas where premium flooring is not needed.

The least expensive available luxury vinyl plank floors tend to be luxury in name only, as it is usually 2 mm thick. In a few rare cases, it even dips down to 1 1/2 mm thick. Extremely thin luxury vinyl has little or no embossing because it is difficult, if not impossible, to emboss such thin materials.

Most inexpensive luxury vinyl floors are referred to as “dry-back” and requires adhesive to install on the floor. Also, you will find two distinctly different products, single- or multiple-board planks:

- Single: Each plank reproduces the look of a *single board* per plank. As an example, a vinyl plank that is 6 inches wide and 36 inches long replicates a board of the same dimensions.
- Multiple: One plank reproduces the look of *multiple, smaller* boards per single, physical plank. As an example, a vinyl plank that is physically 6 inches wide and 36 inches long may replicate the look of six or eight boards that are thinner (much like the 3/4-inch-wide wood plank floors of past).

Another feature of the thin, inexpensive product is that, even if it does have a click/lock system, it may fail upon installation. The tongue/groove areas are structurally too thin and often will break while you try to join the planks. In fact, they may be so thin that they break when removing the planks from the carton.

Installation

Ease of installation is a key advantage to Luxury Vinyl Plank flooring. While you can hire a professional floor installer to put in your flooring, most homeowners choose to install the flooring by themselves. Luxury vinyl plank and tile flooring was practically made for the do-it-yourselfer because the opportunity for error is minimal. Since the learning curve is low, most homeowners can get started on installation right away, with no need to learn special skills or purchase tools unique to the trade. Click-lock planks are also easier for the do-it-yourselfer because they allow for multiple repositioning.

LUXURY VINYL vs. LAMINATE

Luxury vinyl flooring is easier to install than every type of floor covering, except for laminate flooring. Both types of flooring offer click together technology on the sides and the ends. With luxury vinyl, you can cut the ends with a utility knife; laminate must be cut with a saw.

Both are floating floors, which means that they are not attached to the subfloor.

If you confuse luxury vinyl flooring, especially luxury vinyl plank, with laminate flooring, you might have a hard time deciding which to purchase and install. This is not your fault: manufacturers equally promote both as barely distinguishable durable, budget-friendly, do-it-yourself products.

And that is where the similarities end.

Materials, thickness, comfort level, and resistance to moisture are different. Base materials are at the core of the differences.

Begin with two simplifications:

At the Core: Luxury Vinyl and Laminate Defined

Luxury Vinyl Flooring: 100% plastic.

- *This Means:* Superior resistance to moisture. You could submerge vinyl flooring in water for days, with no ill effect.
- *Features:* Forget the ugly vinyl tiles of the past. Plank shapes that are long and narrow, mimicking real wood boards; "click" joinery, allowing adjoining boards to snap together; and improved embossing techniques, vinyl flooring is gaining in popularity once again.

Laminate Flooring: 99% wood product.

- *This Means:* Reasonably moisture resistant if planks remain firmly locked together. Will not be resistant to water in the event of flooding, such as dishwasher overflow.
- *Features:* Laminate flooring gained its foothold in the modern home--especially kitchens--for one reason: it was the first truly wood-look flooring that homeowners could install by themselves.

When Context Is a Consideration?

Winner: Luxury vinyl flooring in bathrooms, laminate flooring everywhere else.

Details below:

Full Bathrooms: pick Luxury vinyl flooring because it matches laminate in cost, looks, and DIY-friendly installation.

But the real deciding factor is moisture. Luxury vinyl flooring decidedly beats laminate in its performance in wet places. Even in better homes where you would not expect to find vinyl flooring, exceptions are made for bathrooms.

It is understood that in these spaces, water-shedding coverings like vinyl flooring or porcelain tile should be used.

All Other Rooms: laminate flooring provides better looks, greater comfort, and greater scratch-resistance.

Kitchen and Powder Rooms: Kitchens and guest bathrooms (i.e., powder rooms that have no bathing facilities), you do not expect water to pool up on the floor. However, some key areas, such as around the sink and dishwasher, can experience enough water to cause the laminate to swell up over time.

Costs

Winner: Comparable

Luxury vinyl flooring ranges from extremely cheap (about \$0.99 sf for thin vinyl planks in basic patterns and styles) to moderate (about \$5.00 for a luxury vinyl plank in so-called premium luxury vinyl styles).

Laminate flooring ranges from very cheap (about \$1.49 sf for 8mm thick planks) to moderately pricey (about \$4.00 for 12mm thick planks). These will most often include attached cushion.

Ease of Installation

Winner: Comparable

Sheet vinyl comes in large rolls and is difficult for homeowners to install because it is so unwieldy. It is also hard to shape around obstructions. But who installs sheet vinyl? Instead, most homeowners are now buying and installing luxury vinyl flooring because it is easier to install since there are fewer pieces to lay, and the planks are easy to shape around objects.

Laminate requires foam moisture underlayment, though this is inexpensive and can be rolled out and taped together quickly (some laminates come with the underlayment pre-attached to the back). Laminate must be cut with a hand saw, circular saw or table saw fitted with an ultra-fine blade or a conventional blade installed backward.

Thickness

Winner: N/A

Ranging from 2.0 mm to 7 mm, luxury vinyl flooring is decidedly thinner than laminate's 8 mm to 12 mm thick planks. But this is the nature of the two products. Laminate flooring will always be thicker by virtue of its pressed-board wood core making it much lighter to handle.

Looks and Resale Value

Winner: Laminate flooring

Formerly a hinderance to a good house sale, luxury vinyl flooring's stature has been creeping upward in recent years, especially with the introduction of luxury vinyl flooring (LVP & LVT). Still, as noted earlier, buyers may expect, or excuse, luxury vinyl flooring in the bathroom but will cast a more critical eye on a living room floored with luxury vinyl, even nice luxury vinyl.

While not having the resale value approaching solid or engineered hardwood flooring, laminate does have moderately good value and usually will not put off home buyers. If anything, laminate flooring has had a few years' head start over luxury vinyl in terms of introducing features that consumers like, such as deeper embossing, better imaging, and improved click-joinery.

Moisture Resistance

Winner: Luxury vinyl flooring

Luxury vinyl flooring can be installed in any room of the house since it is extremely resistant to moisture.

Laminate is only moderately water-resistant and is not recommended for bathrooms or basements that experience even the slightest moisture infiltration.

Water-resistant laminate flooring, once a dream of flooring manufacturers, has become a moribund product.

Comfort

Winner: Laminate flooring

Luxury vinyl flooring, if installed directly on a subfloor or concrete, is hard and cold.

Because laminate is thicker than vinyl and incorporates wood content, it is easier to walk on and warmer to the touch than vinyl. Introducing foam underlayment adds even more comfort to laminate.

"Green" Value

Winner: Comparable

At one time, vinyl flooring was the "bad boy," earning status as one of the least "green" flooring products. But now, flooring manufacturers now produce vinyl flooring that achieves a LEED credit EQ4.3 for Low-Emitting Material.

Laminate flooring uses wood content. Manufacturers produce a laminate that qualifies for LEED MR4 (Recycled Content) status.