

Grout has many types and uses

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Choice of grouting usually depends on the tile installation.

Cement grout, properly mixed with a latex additive, cured and sealed with a penetrating sealer has excellent durability, stain-resistance and cleanability. It comes in two basic types, and the choice of which one to use depends not on the tiles, but on the width of the joints between them.

Unsanded grout, a pudding-smooth blend of Portland cement and powdered pigments mixed with water, is recommended for narrow joints of half an inch or less.

Wider joints require sanded grout, which is the same material, but with sand added. The sand helps bulk up the grout and keeps it from shrinking in the joints.

The older cement-based grouts were brittle and prone to cracking, with irregularities in coloring. Today's grouts use polymer

additives, which ensure color quality and increased flexibility, allowing for joint widths of up to 1 1/4 inches.

Wider joints are helpful in forming a durable bridging for tile installations that have irregularities in shape and thickness, such as handmade tiles.

Both sanded and unsanded grouts are porous and subject to staining. To prevent stain penetration, the application of a sealer is recommended after the grout has cured for a couple of days and is completely dry.

Sealers come in two varieties: membrane-forming and penetrating. The first type is prone to peeling or getting cloudy when residual moisture from mastic or underlayers pushes to the surface of the tile.

Penetrating sealers, which still breathe after soaking into the tile and grout, are preferable.

A third type of grout — epoxy grout — is another option. Unlike cement

grouts, it's virtually impermeable to every kind of liquid or chemical, so it won't stain or attract as much mold, mildew and dirt. It is high performance, as well as high priced — costing at least four times as much as cement grout.

However, it is particularly ideal for certain environments, such as a kitchen countertop, which is exposed to acids and grease. Epoxy grout is a two-or-three-part system made from resin, catalyst, sand and pigment fillers.

When you mix the resin with the catalyst, a chemical hardening process begins. Sand and pigments add texture and color. These fillers also act as thickeners, so the mix won't sag and run out of vertical grout lines.

Older epoxy grout products were extremely difficult to handle. Today's epoxy grouts are 100 percent (or nearly) solids, which means that they contain little or no solvent. You proba-

bly won't need a respirator to work with them, but check manufacturer's instructions to make sure.

In any case, work in a well-ventilated area and wear plastic gloves to keep the epoxy off your skin. Working with epoxy grouts is different than with cement grouts. Read product directions, following mixing, installation and cleanup instructions exactly. Check with your ceramic tile dealer, or a professional ceramic tile installer, for a recommended brand.

Use flexible caulk in expansion joints and other joints that are likely to move, like the corners of shower walls or the joint between the countertop and wall tile. Epoxy forms a powerful bond. If it hardens in those joints, it can tear the tile off walls or crack the glaze when the joints move.

Be sure your ceramic tile is well seated in the setting adhesive to prevent epoxy grout from flowing into

Grout expectations

Cement grout, when properly mixed with a latex additive, cured and sealed with a penetrating sealer, has excellent durability, stain-resistance and cleanability. It comes in two types, and the choice of which to use depends on the width of the joints between tiles. Sealers come in varying degrees of quality with the most expensive being best.

GROUT	USE
• Unsanded	For narrow joints of 1/8 inch or less.
• Sanded	Wider joints 1/8 inch up to 1 1/4 inches. Helps form a durable bridge for handmade tiles.
SEALER	DRAWBACKS
• Membrane	Peels or clouds when residual moisture from underlayments pushes to the surface of the tile.
• Penetrating	Soaks into the tile and grout.
• Epoxy	Costs at least four times as much as cement grout.



Epoxy sealer is ideal for kitchen countertops, which are exposed to acids and grease.

voids under the tile. The tile and adhesive must be dry before applying any grout, cement or epoxy.

Stay off a finished surface for at least 24 hours to give the grout a chance to harden completely.

Putting down roots: The care and feeding of new trees

BY ED HUTCHISON

Special to the Record-Eagle

Here are a few words of hope — and caution — to anyone planning to plant a new tree this spring:

Trees are easy to care for — and newly planted trees are especially easy to kill.

Musing over a Saturday morning breakfast recently, a good friend and excellent landscaper remarked: "Two things kill a tree — too much or too little water."

Mostly he had seen instances where too little water was the culprit.

In fact, other factors can kill a tree — disease, insects, damage from string trimmers and mowers, change in soil grade, soil compaction and so on — but in most cases, his experience and mine suggests that it is water to blame for the premature death of many a fine, young ornamental tree.

During the first season, a tree becomes acclimated to its new home. New roots begin to grow in all directions, the root ball is settling in and anchoring itself and leaves are busy carrying out photosynthesis to fuel this growth. Its world is pretty much limited to the hole that was dug for it and the native soil that surrounds it.

The best way to manage a tree's water supply is to surround the trunk with a blanket of organic mulch. Grass is a fierce competitor for water and nutrients, even for a mature tree. And it gives the feeder roots a bit under the surface much easier access to water from rainfall or irrigation. The mulch will also keep the soil cool and reduce weeding as well as save the tree from scraps and bumps from string trimmers and lawnmowers.

Another benefit of the trunk circled with mulch: It looks good. As to distance out, go at least 24 inches from the trunk, more on larger trees. Don't go to the bother and expense of adding plastic edging. Cutting through the soil a couple times a summer with a sharp shovel will provide an edge that keeps grass from invading the mulched area.

How to water? I think two methods are ideal.

The first is with a root feeder as it lets you deliver water 20 inches or so underground. Use it as you would when feeding trees (you should not feed them now, however) and set it so that water runs on the slow side. Insert it in the soil closer to the drip line of the tree than to the trunk, in three to seven spots around the tree — the difference being in size of the tree. Let the water run 10 minutes with each "insertion."

The other method is to let the hose, nozzle-less, run very slowly on the ground and in the same spots and for the same length of time just mentioned. I prefer to use a bubbler for this as it breaks up the stream of water nicely and run-offs are greatly reduced as a result.

With either method, the important thing is that water is delivered slowly so the soil above and below ground has time to soak it up.

Too much water? Yes, you can over-water a tree. I see no reason to be watering it every day or even every other day. A newly planted tree has limited capacity to take up water and nutrients so it is fairly easy to give it too much.

Absent rainfall, a newly planted tree should be watered every five days or so and more frequently if there is no mulch or the weather is blistering hot and the tree is planted in full sun. If you use the rough time recommendations mentioned above, this means that the a new tree will get 30 minutes of slow watering every five days. Soil conditions should be considered as well — heavy soils will hold moisture while sandy ones will let it pass more freely.

The important thing is less which technique you use or how precisely you place applications or times but that you realize — and act on — a tree's need for water in the summer.

A word about feeding and staking: Newly planted trees and shrubs should not be fertilized during the first year. After that, a good time

to feed is late winter or early autumn. You don't want to feed now because

doing so may force out top growth that would not have a chance to harden before

cold weather returns. Invest a few dollars and a bit of time to install a sturdy support system to keep in place for the tree's first year in your yard. Look for staking kits at your favorite nursery.

Some use one very sturdy and long stake while others use several much shorter ones.

Ed Hutchison is a freelance writer from Midland.



Photo/Ed Hutchison

Staking a tree for its first year helps the roots get established. Choose a sturdy system that will hold up for 12 months — and especially one that does not cut into the bark of the tree.

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