

## Replacing a Laminate Countertop

page 1 of 3

Chips and flaws in laminate countertops can make a kitchen look run-down and dirty. Fix the problem yourself by replacing the counter surface with a new laminate covering. Hundreds of colors and patterns are available. It's an easy weekend project for a confident do-it-yourselfer who is careful with measurements and cutting. Lowe's is pleased to provide this information as a service to you.

### Tools & Materials

#### Tools

- Dowels or strips of lath
- Hand roller (the heavier the better)
- Circular saw, saber saw or hand saw
- Compressed air or small vacuum cleaner
- Router with laminate cutting router bit
- Carpenter's Square
- Scribing compass
- Steam iron
- Drill/driver
- Sandpaper
- Tape measure
- Utility knife
- Pencil
- Safety goggles
- Metal file

#### Materials

- Laminate sheets
- Contact cement with applicator
- Piece of scrap cotton cloth
- Masking tape
- Caulk
- Edge trim kit (optional)
- Screws (optional)



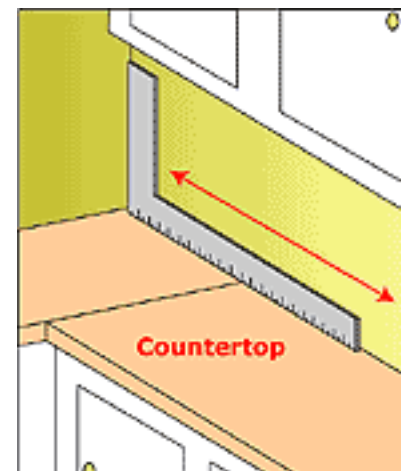
New countertop surfaces can give an older kitchen a fresh look.

### Making Preparations

Before you start, store the laminate in your kitchen for at least 48 hours so it will adjust to the temperature and humidity there.

New laminate can be installed directly onto an existing laminate countertop that is not loose or damaged. Removing old laminate is time-consuming and often results in damage to the underlayment. If the existing laminate is damaged or loose, screw a sheet of 5.2mm import hardwood plywood on top of it to provide a solid base for the new surface.

1. Sand and clean the surface, making sure it is even. Completely remove any dust, paint or varnish so the new laminate will stick properly. If new laminate is going directly over old laminate, make sure to roughen the surface of the old material so the adhesive will work.
2. Measure the dimensions of the countertop, including the backsplash if it will be covered.
3. Use a carpenter's square to test the straightness of the walls where the laminate will meet them. If you find bows or dips in the surface of the wall, hold the laminate sheet in place and scribe the contours onto it. Trim along the scribe mark, following the cutting instructions below to avoid chipping. This process will allow the laminate to fit snugly against the walls that it touches.



Use a carpenter's square to check the contour of the walls.

## Replacing a Laminate Countertop

page 2 of 3

### Cutting the Laminate

You have several choices for cutting tools: circular saw, saber saw, hand saw or utility knife. Use a fine-toothed blade and place a strip of masking tape over the area to be cut to prevent chipping. Mark the cut line on the masking tape.



**The method of cutting the laminate depends upon the tool you are using to make the cuts:**

- For utility knife cuts, score the laminate from the top with a straight edge and snap it on the scored line.
- If you're using a power saw, cut from the bottom side of the material to prevent chipping.
- With a hand saw, cut from the top side with a low angle, exerting pressure as you stroke into the cut.

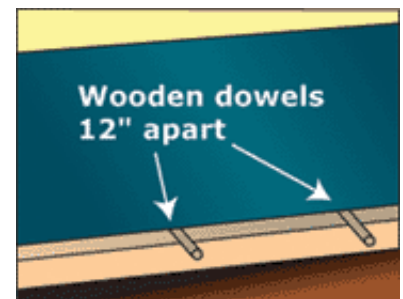
1. Cut the laminate material to size, leaving a margin of at least 1" on all sides that overhang the countertop.
2. Lay the pieces out together to ensure proper fit before applying adhesive.

### Getting Ready to Install

1. Shut off the power to any electrical appliances in the work area, and disconnect and remove anything attached to the countertop, such as a drop-in range.
2. Shut off the water supply at the valves under the sink and disconnect the hot and cold water supply lines as well as the drainpipes. Remove the sink from the countertop and set it aside.

### Applying the Adhesive

1. Brush contact cement onto the counter surface and the back of the laminate sheet. Let both surfaces dry according to the instructions on the label. Properly dried surfaces will not be sticky to the touch, but will bond to each other instantly. If the cement dries too much, the bond will be weakened.
2. Lay wooden dowel rods or strips of lath every 6"-12" along the countertop. Place the laminate on top of the rods and make sure it is aligned properly. Once the laminate touches the countertop it cannot be repositioned, but the 1" margin leaves some room for error. You'll trim the excess at the end.
3. Note that the laminate will cover the hole for the sink. If you have a drop-in range, it will also cover this hole. You'll cut these holes out later.



Use a carpenter's square to check the contour of the walls.

### Attaching the Laminate

1. One by one, remove the wood pieces and press the laminate into position. Use sweeping motions from the center of the counter outward to prevent bubbles from forming.
2. When all the wood pieces have been removed, apply firm, even pressure all over the countertop with a hand roller. Apply extra pressure near the edges.



If a bubble appears in the laminate, cover it with a piece of scrap cotton cloth and press it with a steam iron. The heat will loosen the adhesive and allow you to roll out the bubble.

## Replacing a Laminate Countertop

page 3 of 3

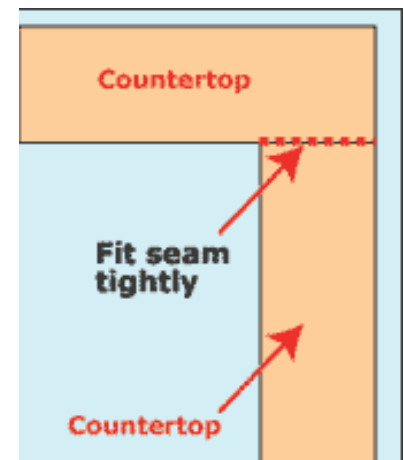
3. When the adhesive has dried according to the manufacturer's directions, use a router with a laminate trimming bit to cut the extra material away from the edges. Wear safety goggles while trimming.
4. Use a file to smooth out rough spots and to bevel the edge to 45 degrees, making it less likely to pry loose. When filing, be sure to apply pressure only in a downward direction to avoid chipping or separation.
5. Drill a 3/4" hole near the center of the sink opening and use the router with a laminate trimming bit to cut the sink hole out completely. Finish with a fine-toothed saw. Use this same method if you need to cut out an area for a drop-in range.

### Dealing with Corners

For simplicity, fit the corners with two square-ended pieces of laminate. Miter cuts look neater but require precise measurements to fit together properly.

To make a seam:

1. Install the larger piece of laminate first.
2. Position the smaller piece using the dowel rods or lath, and cover the seam edge to keep the cement from sticking.
3. Make sure the second piece will fit tightly against the first, and remove the protective covering to make the adhesion, working toward the seam.
4. Roll thoroughly with the hand roller.



Use two square-ended pieces of laminate to simplify corners.

### Covering the Edges

1. Metal or plastic mouldings are available to finish the edges of the countertop. You can also cut strips of the laminate and apply them with the contact cement.
2. Use two coats of adhesive on the edge of the counter and one on the laminate strip. Align the strip along the top with your fingers as you press it into place.
3. Hold the edge strips in place with pieces of tape until the adhesive is thoroughly dry. Any overhang at the bottom can be filed to an even line after the adhesive is dry.
4. Cover the backsplash the same way.

### Finishing Touches

1. Seal all seams and edges with caulk to keep moisture from reaching the core material. Pay special attention to backsplash seams and those near the sink.
2. Replace the sink and reinstall water connections. Replace and reconnect any appliances, and turn power back on to the work area.