Can kitchen countertop and backsplash tiles be painted?

Q. I just bought a house that has very dated floral designs baked into various kitchen tiles on the counters and backsplash. Is it possible to remove the design and repaint the tile? I would be ok with a different color tile as long as I could remove the flowers.

A. It's totally understandable that you'd want to update the old floral tiles in your kitchen. There are a few different approaches you can take. Some work better in certain areas than others, especially when it comes to surfaces that are used for food prep.

For the backsplash, you may be able to paint the tiles using a durable epoxy-based tile paint. Since backsplashes typically don't endure heavy wear and aren't directly used for food preparation, painted tile can hold up reasonably well provided you're gentle with cleaning and avoid abrasive scrubbing. Just be sure to use a product that's designed for tile and can withstand some moisture and heat.

For countertops, painting is not recommended. Countertops get a lot more use, from cutting and hot pans to spills and frequent cleaning. Paint simply won't hold up. Even epoxy-based coatings are prone to chipping or scratching, and that poses a serious concern when it comes to food safety. Bits of chipped paint can end up in your food, and a compromised surface can harbor bacteria in tiny cracks or damaged spots.

Some people consider using peel-and-stick tiles as a quick fix, but that's also a short-term solution. These stickers can lift at the edges over time. When that happens, they're no longer sanitary. If you go this route, make sure the brand specifically states that the product is safe for use on food-prep surfaces. Purchase extras and be prepared to replace them periodically. They are best

thought of as a cosmetic cover-up, not a lasting or food-safe alternative.

The options we have mentioned could buy some time while you save for a kitchen renovation, but if you're ready for a more permanent solution, the best options are:

- Full replacement of the tiled countertop with a more modern surface like quartz, granite, or solid surface material.

- Assuming the tiles are mostly in good shape, you could hire a stone and tile restoration contractor to selectively remove and replace only the unwanted tiles with a more neutral option. You will need to find replacement tiles in compatible size and thickness. (This option may not be cost effective if there are many tiles to replace.) To find a vetted PRO in your area, visit www.surfacecarepros.com and click on **Find a PRO**.

- There are specialty resurfacing companies that apply a new finish over old tile countertops. These finishes can look like solid surfaces or stone, and some are even approved for food-contact use. However, they need to be professionally applied and come with varying durability depending on the product.

Whatever route you choose, make sure that any surface you prep food on is durable, sealed (if porous), and meets basic food safety standards. If you plan to live in the home for a while or are concerned with resale value, investing in permanent updates like new countertops or tile replacement may actually be more cost-effective in the long run. Temporary fixes may need redoing every few years, which adds up over time.

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