



Terracotta Tile Sealing & Installation Guide

Technical Guidance for Specification, Installation and Long-Term Performance

1. Introduction

Terracotta tiles are porous and require appropriate sealing to ensure durability, stain resistance and long-term performance.

Correct sealing protects terracotta tiles during installation, reduces moisture absorption, minimises the risk of efflorescence, and enhances the finished appearance of the surface. This document provides general technical guidance on sealing and installing terracotta tiles for both internal and external applications.

2. General Principles of Sealing Terracotta

- Terracotta tiles must be sealed **before installation** and **after grouting**
- Penetrating sealers formulated for terracotta should be used
- Sealers may produce a natural, matt or enhanced finish depending on the product selected
- All sealers should be tested on a sample/spare tile prior to full application
- Manufacturer technical data sheets must always be followed

Sealing does not eliminate natural variation in colour or texture, which is an inherent characteristic of terracotta.

3. Hidrofugar (Pre-Sealing / Waterproofing)

3.1 Description

Alhambra Tiles offers a **pre-sealing (hidrofugar) service** for projects requiring an additional level of protection prior to installation.

Tiles are dipped to apply an initial waterproofing treatment, which helps to reduce moisture absorption during installation and minimise the risk of efflorescence appearing on the tile surface after laying.

3.2 Scope and Limitations

- Hidrofugar provides **initial protection only**. It removes the chalky finish of the tile, however does not alter the natural colour.
- It does **not replace standard sealing requirements**
- Tiles must still be sealed before and after grouting in accordance with best practice
- Suitability should be confirmed at project stage

This service is particularly beneficial for projects where moisture control during installation is critical.

4. Pre-Sealing of Terracotta Tiles (On Site)

4.1 Tile Preparation

- Lay tiles out in a clean, well-ventilated area
- Inspect each tile for cracks, defects or irregularities
- Remove dust and surface debris using a soft brush or cloth
- Ensure tiles are completely dry prior to sealing

4.2 Sealer Selection

- Use a penetrating sealer specifically formulated for terracotta
- Confirm suitability for:
 - internal or external use
 - floor or wall applications

4.3 Application

- Apply sealer evenly using a clean brush or roller and ensure complete coverage without pooling
- Wipe away excess where necessary
- Allow sealer to penetrate and dry fully before installation

Drying times vary depending on the product used and site conditions.



5. Indoor Installation Guidance

5.1 Subfloor Preparation

- Substrate must be clean, dry, level and structurally sound
- Use a levelling compound where required

5.2 Layout Planning

- Dry lay tiles to confirm layout, pattern and cuts
- Maintain consistent joint widths throughout
- Adjust layout to avoid small or awkward cuts where possible

5.3 Adhesive Application

- Use a thin-set mortar suitable for terracotta tiles
- Apply evenly using a notched trowel and work in manageable sections to prevent skinning

5.4 Tile Installation

- Press pre-sealed tiles firmly into the adhesive
- Use spacers to maintain consistent joints
- Check alignment regularly

5.5 Grouting

- Allow adhesive to cure before grouting
- Use a grout suitable for terracotta and apply using a grout float
- Remove excess grout during application using a damp sponge

5.6 Final Sealing

- Allow grout to cure fully
 - Apply a second coat of penetrating sealer to the entire surface
 - Avoid foot traffic until fully dry
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6. Outdoor Installation Guidance

6.1 Base Preparation

- Substrate must be stable, compacted and correctly sloped for drainage
- Use a suitable concrete base or prepared bedding system
- Ensure adequate falls away from buildings

6.2 Layout Planning

- Dry lay tiles to confirm alignment and spacing
- Consider drainage points and transitions

6.3 Adhesive Application

- Use a polymer-modified adhesive suitable for external use
- Apply in manageable sections and ensure full adhesive coverage beneath each tile

6.4 Tile Installation

- Press pre-sealed tiles firmly into the adhesive
- Maintain consistent joint widths
- Check levels and alignment regularly

6.5 Grouting

- Use an exterior-grade grout
- Remove excess grout promptly
- Clean tile surfaces thoroughly during application

6.6 Final Sealing

- Allow installation to cure fully
 - Apply an external-grade penetrating sealer
 - Follow manufacturer instructions for drying and curing
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7. Maintenance and Re-Sealing

- Periodic re-sealing may be required depending on use, wear and exposure
 - Clean using products suitable for sealed terracotta
 - Avoid acidic, abrasive or aggressive cleaning agents
 - Regular maintenance will extend the life and appearance of the installation
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8. Important Notes

- Natural variation in colour and texture is inherent to terracotta tiles
 - Sealing may subtly deepen or enhance surface appearance
 - Efflorescence is a natural occurrence and is minimised through correct sealing and installation practices
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9. Disclaimer

This document is provided as **general technical guidance only**.

All tile installations should be carried out by a competent builder, tiler or mason. Alhambra Tiles cannot be held responsible for any issues arising during or after installation of tiles supplied.

Always refer to the sealant manufacturer's technical data and seek professional advice where required.

