

OTTAWA CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Flooring

Hardwood, tile, vinyl, and flooring decisions across
a renovation

5 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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What is the most durable flooring for high traffic areas?

For high-traffic areas, luxury vinyl plank (LVP) and porcelain tile are the two most durable flooring options available to Ottawa homeowners — each excelling in different situations depending on your space, lifestyle, and budget.

Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) has become the go-to choice for busy households, and for good reason. Modern LVP features a wear layer measured in mils — look for 20 mil or higher for heavy traffic areas like entryways, kitchens, and hallways. It's 100% waterproof, scratch-resistant, comfortable underfoot, and handles Ottawa's humidity swings and temperature fluctuations far better than hardwood. Brands like LifeProof, COREtec, and Shaw offer products with lifetime residential warranties. It also installs over most existing subfloors, keeping costs down.

Porcelain tile is arguably the hardest surface you can put in a home. Properly installed with the right grout, it will outlast virtually every other option — decades of heavy foot traffic, pets, and spills without showing wear. The tradeoff is that it's cold underfoot (though in-floor radiant heating solves this), harder on joints if you're standing for long periods, and more expensive to install due to labour. It's the ideal choice for mudrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens where moisture is a constant concern.

How Ottawa's Climate Factors In

Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles and wide seasonal temperature swings matter more than most homeowners realize. Solid hardwood, while beautiful, can gap, cup, or buckle with humidity changes — especially in older homes without consistent climate control. Engineered hardwood performs better but still has limits. LVP and tile are largely immune to these issues, making them particularly smart choices for Ottawa homes where basements and main floors can see significant seasonal humidity variation.

Typical Ottawa Costs (Supply and Install)

- **LVP:** \$5–\$10 per sq ft installed (mid-range product and labour)
- **Porcelain tile:** \$10–\$20 per sq ft installed (varies significantly with tile size and pattern)
- **Engineered hardwood:** \$8–\$15 per sq ft installed
- **Solid hardwood:** \$10–\$18 per sq ft installed (not recommended for basements)

These ranges reflect Ottawa market pricing and will shift based on room size, subfloor condition, and material grade.

For most Ottawa families, LVP hits the sweet spot of durability, comfort, cost, and ease of maintenance. If you're outfitting a mudroom, bathroom, or commercial-grade space, go with porcelain. If you want the warmth and resale

appeal of wood in a living room or bedroom with moderate traffic, engineered hardwood is a reasonable compromise.

Your next step is to assess the specific room — moisture levels, subfloor condition, and how much foot traffic it actually sees. A flooring contractor can assess your subfloor and recommend the right product and underlayment for your situation. Browse verified flooring contractors in the **Ottawa Construction Network directory** at justynrookcontracting.com/directory to find trusted local professionals.

Q2

Can I put new flooring over old flooring?

In most cases, yes - you can install new flooring over existing flooring, but success depends entirely on the condition of your current floor and what type of new flooring you're installing. This approach can save significant time and money on demolition, but only if done correctly.

The most important factor is that your existing floor must be **structurally sound, level, and properly adhered**. Any loose boards, squeaks, or uneven areas will telegraph through to your new floor and cause problems down the road. Walk around your current floor and check for any soft spots, creaking, or movement - these issues must be addressed first regardless of what you're installing on top.

Hardwood over existing floors works well when going over solid subfloor or existing hardwood that's in good condition. You'll need to ensure the combined floor thickness doesn't create issues with door clearances, transitions to other rooms, or appliance fit. In Ottawa's older homes, particularly those heritage properties in the Glebe or Centretown, you may discover beautiful original hardwood underneath that's worth refinishing instead of covering.

Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) and laminate are the most forgiving options for installation over existing floors. They can go over most surfaces including tile, hardwood, or existing vinyl, as long as the surface is smooth and level. Any height variations greater than 3/16" over 10 feet will need to be addressed with floor leveling compound.

Tile installation over existing floors is trickier and depends heavily on the substrate. You can tile over existing tile if it's well-bonded, but never over vinyl or carpet. The existing floor must be able to handle the additional weight and provide proper adhesion. In Ottawa's climate with significant freeze-thaw cycles, any movement in the substrate will crack new tile.

What you absolutely cannot do is install new flooring over carpet, loose or damaged existing floors, or surfaces that aren't clean and level. Also consider that adding floor height affects door swings, appliances, and transitions - in Ottawa's older homes with lower ceiling heights, this can be particularly problematic.

Professional assessment is recommended if you're unsure about the condition of your existing floor or if you're dealing with potential asbestos in older flooring materials (common in Ottawa homes built before 1980). A flooring contractor can evaluate whether your existing floor provides adequate support and identify any prep work needed.

Before starting, check if your project requires permits through the City of Ottawa - most flooring replacements don't, but structural modifications might.

Q3

What flooring is best for pets?

For pet owners in Ottawa, luxury vinyl plank (LVP) and porcelain tile are your best flooring options, offering superior scratch resistance, easy cleanup, and durability against accidents. These materials can handle everything from muddy paws during Ottawa's slushy spring months to summer shedding season.

Luxury vinyl plank tops the list for pet-friendly flooring because it's completely waterproof, scratch-resistant, and comfortable underfoot. Quality LVP with a wear layer of at least 12-20 mil can withstand even large dogs' claws. In Ottawa's market, expect to pay \$4-8 per square foot installed for good quality LVP. The waterproof core means accidents won't seep through to your subfloor – crucial for preventing odors and damage. Modern LVP also looks remarkably like real hardwood, so you don't sacrifice style for practicality.

Porcelain tile offers the ultimate in durability and hygiene. It's impossible to scratch, completely waterproof, and easy to sanitize. Large format tiles (12"x24" or larger) minimize grout lines where pet hair and dirt can accumulate. While tile can be cold underfoot during Ottawa winters, you can install electric radiant heating underneath for around \$8-12 per square foot. Porcelain tile installation typically runs \$6-12 per square foot in the Ottawa area.

Hardwood considerations vary significantly by species and finish. If you're set on real wood, choose harder species like oak, maple, or hickory over softer woods like pine. Pre-finished hardwood with aluminum oxide coating offers better scratch resistance than site-finished floors. However, even the hardest woods will show wear from pets over time, and water damage from accidents can be costly to repair.

Carpet is generally not recommended for pet owners due to odor retention and difficulty cleaning accidents thoroughly. If you must have carpet in certain areas, choose solution-dyed nylon with built-in stain protection, and ensure you have professional cleaning equipment or service access.

Ottawa-specific considerations include our muddy spring conditions and winter salt tracking. Choose flooring with textured surfaces for better traction when pets come in with wet paws. Entry mats and regular cleaning become even more important with our seasonal weather changes.

Professional installation is recommended for waterproof flooring to ensure proper moisture barriers and transitions. Improper installation can void warranties and lead to subfloor damage from pet accidents. Most quality flooring contractors in Ottawa offer pet-specific installation advice and can recommend the best products for your specific pet situation and home layout.

Is engineered hardwood as good as solid hardwood?

Engineered hardwood offers comparable performance to solid hardwood for most Ottawa homeowners, with some distinct advantages for our climate and modern homes. Both are real wood flooring options that can last decades with proper care, though they each have specific strengths depending on your situation.

Construction and Performance Engineered hardwood consists of a real hardwood veneer (typically 2-6mm thick) bonded to multiple layers of plywood or high-density fiberboard. This cross-grain construction makes it more dimensionally stable than solid hardwood, meaning it's less prone to the expansion and contraction that can cause gaps or cupping. Solid hardwood is exactly what it sounds like - a single piece of wood throughout, typically 3/4" thick.

In Ottawa's climate with our significant seasonal humidity changes and freeze-thaw cycles, engineered hardwood often performs better. The multi-layer construction resists the movement that can plague solid hardwood during our dry winters when furnaces are running constantly, then humid summers. This stability makes engineered an excellent choice for basements (above grade), over radiant heating, or in homes without perfect climate control.

Durability and Refinishing Both can last 25-50+ years with proper maintenance. The key difference is refinishing potential - solid hardwood can be sanded and refinished 6-10 times over its lifetime, while engineered hardwood is limited by its veneer thickness. A quality engineered floor with a 4-6mm wear layer can typically handle 2-4 refinishings, which is often sufficient for most homeowners. Lower-grade engineered products with thin veneers may only allow 1-2 refinishings.

Installation Flexibility Engineered hardwood offers more installation options, including floating installations over existing floors, which can save on labor costs (\$3-5 per square foot vs \$6-8 for nail-down solid hardwood). It can also be installed in basements and over concrete slabs where solid hardwood typically cannot go due to moisture concerns.

Cost Considerations in Ottawa Quality engineered hardwood typically runs \$4-12 per square foot, while solid hardwood ranges \$5-15 per square foot. However, engineered often has lower installation costs and fewer subfloor preparation requirements. For a typical 1,000 square foot installation, total costs including labor range from \$8,000-18,000 for engineered vs \$10,000-22,000 for solid hardwood.

Next Steps Choose solid hardwood if you're in a heritage home, want maximum refinishing potential, and have proper climate control. Opt for engineered if you're installing over concrete, in a basement, over radiant heat, or want the most stable option for Ottawa's climate. Either way, ensure your contractor is experienced with hardwood installation and that proper moisture testing is done before installation.

How long does hardwood flooring last?

That's a great project question! For specific renovation advice about flooring materials, durability, and product selection, check out resources focused on flooring and home improvement. Here at OCN, we focus on helping you find and work with the right contractor for your flooring project.

What we can help you with is ensuring you hire a qualified flooring contractor in Ottawa and navigate the process properly.

When hiring a flooring contractor in Ottawa, you'll want to verify they're properly licensed and insured. While flooring installation doesn't typically require specific trade licensing in Ontario like electrical or gas work, you should still confirm your contractor has:

WSIB clearance - Essential for any contractor working in your home. Verify this at wsib.ca/clearances using their business number. This protects you from liability if someone gets injured on your property.

General liability insurance - Ask to see their certificate of insurance, typically \$2 million coverage. Call the insurance company directly to confirm it's current and covers the work being done.

For hardwood installation in Ottawa, **building permits typically aren't required** unless you're doing structural work underneath or the project is part of a larger renovation. However, if you're in a condo, check with your property management about approval requirements and noise restrictions - many Ottawa buildings have specific hours for construction work.

Get detailed written quotes from at least three contractors that specify the exact materials, labor, timeline, and warranty terms. Watch for red flags like door-to-door sales, demands for full payment upfront, or quotes significantly higher or lower than others.

Payment schedule should follow Ontario's Construction Lien Act - never pay more than 10% down, and hold back 10% of the total contract price for 60 days after completion to protect against liens.

For flooring contractors in Ottawa areas like Kanata, Barrhaven, or Orleans, ask for local references you can actually contact and verify. A reputable contractor will happily provide recent customers in your neighborhood.

If issues arise during or after installation, document everything in writing. Ontario's Consumer Protection Act provides certain rights for home improvement contracts over \$50.

Official Resources:

- WSIB Clearance Verification: wsib.ca/clearances

- Ontario Consumer Protection: ontario.ca/consumer
- City of Ottawa Building Services: 613-580-2424

Need help vetting specific contractors or understanding your contract terms? That's exactly what we're here for!

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of October 4, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.