NEW BRUNSWICK FLOORING

Installation Tips

Flooring installation techniques, expansion gaps, transitions, underlayment, and best practices for NB climate conditions

16 Expert Answers from Floor IQ

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Q1

What is the proper installation method for cork flooring in a New Brunswick home with radiant heat?

Cork flooring over radiant heat requires floating installation with specific temperature protocols and moisture management — never glue-down cork directly to a heated subfloor in New Brunswick's challenging humidity environment.

Cork flooring works beautifully with radiant heat systems when installed correctly, but the Maritime climate adds complexity that demands careful attention to moisture control and temperature management. The natural cellular structure of cork provides excellent thermal insulation, which actually helps distribute radiant heat more evenly while remaining comfortable underfoot.

Floating Installation is Essential

Always install cork flooring as a floating system over radiant heat — never glue cork directly to the heated subfloor. The constant temperature cycling of radiant systems causes expansion and contraction that will stress and eventually fail glued-down installations. Quality cork planks with click-lock edges (like Wicanders or Cali Bamboo cork) float over the heating system with proper underlayment, allowing the entire floor to move as one unit during thermal expansion.

Use a thin, dense underlayment specifically rated for radiant heat — typically 2-3mm cork or rubber underlayment with low thermal resistance (R-value under 0.5). Avoid thick foam underlayments that insulate against the radiant heat you're paying to generate. The underlayment must include a moisture barrier since New Brunswick's humidity cycles will drive moisture through concrete slabs even with radiant systems operating.

Temperature Management Protocol

Before cork installation, run the radiant system through a complete heat-up and cool-down cycle to identify any hot spots or uneven heating zones. During installation, maintain the subfloor temperature at 65-68°F — never install cork over a heated floor exceeding 70°F as this can cause immediate expansion and buckling.

After installation, gradually increase the temperature by 2-3 degrees per day until reaching your desired comfort level. Never exceed 80°F surface temperature with cork flooring — higher temperatures can cause the cork to dry out and crack, especially during New Brunswick's winter heating season when indoor humidity drops below 30%. Most cork manufacturers void warranties for surface temperatures above 80°F.

New Brunswick Moisture Considerations

Cork's natural moisture resistance makes it suitable for radiant heat applications, but New Brunswick's extreme seasonal humidity swings require extra attention. Install a whole-home humidifier to maintain 35-45% relative humidity during heating season — this protects both the cork flooring and maximizes the efficiency of your radiant system.

Spring moisture migration through concrete slabs can create problems even with radiant heat operating. Test concrete moisture levels with a calcium chloride test before installation, and consider a dimpled drainage membrane under the cork underlayment if moisture readings exceed manufacturer specifications.

Professional Installation Recommended

While cork flooring installation appears straightforward, coordinating the radiant heat system timing, moisture management, and temperature protocols requires experience with both flooring and heating systems. A professional installer familiar with radiant applications will ensure proper expansion gaps (10-12mm around all walls and fixed objects), correct underlayment selection, and appropriate heat-up procedures.

Find radiant-experienced flooring contractors through the New Brunswick Construction Network directory — look for installers who specifically mention radiant heat experience and can coordinate with your heating system contractor for optimal results.

Q2

How do I properly undercut door casings for a flush flooring installation in my older NB home with plaster walls?

Undercutting door casings allows your new flooring to slide underneath for a clean, professional appearance without visible gaps or transition strips. This technique is essential in older NB homes where thick plaster walls and substantial trim work make removing and reinstalling casings impractical.

The Right Tools Make All the Difference

Use an oscillating multi-tool with a wood cutting blade for the cleanest cuts in NB's older hardwood trim. These tools vibrate rather than rotate, preventing the aggressive action that can crack brittle old paint or loosen plaster around the casing. A manual undercut saw (Japanese pull saw) works for small jobs but requires steady hands and patience. Avoid circular saws or reciprocating saws near plaster walls — the vibration can crack the plaster or damage the wall-to-trim connection.

Set your cutting depth to match your new flooring thickness plus underlayment. For laminate or LVP with foam underlayment, this typically means 10-12mm total. For engineered hardwood, measure the actual plank thickness — it varies from 8-20mm depending on the product. **Always cut 1-2mm higher than your measurement** to ensure the flooring slides easily without binding.

Protecting NB's Plaster Walls

Older NB homes often have horsehair plaster that's become brittle after 60-100 years. Before cutting, score the paint line where the casing meets the wall using a sharp utility knife. This prevents paint from chipping or peeling beyond your cut line. Place painter's tape along the wall above your cut line for additional protection.

Work slowly with light pressure — let the tool do the work rather than forcing it. The oscillating action cuts through multiple paint layers and old-growth lumber gradually. Rushing leads to tear-out, especially where the grain changes direction in mitered corners.

Managing the Mess

Undercutting creates fine sawdust that settles into every crevice. Tape plastic sheeting over heating vents and use a shop vacuum with a brush attachment to collect dust as you work. In homes with forced-air heating, this prevents sawdust from circulating through your ductwork for months afterward.

Special Considerations for Maritime Conditions

NB's humidity cycles cause wood trim to expand and contract seasonally. If you're installing flooring during the dry winter months (October through April), the casings may be at their most contracted state. Leave an extra 1mm of clearance to account for summer expansion — this prevents the flooring from binding when humidity returns in June.

When to Hire a Professional

Consider professional installation if your home has intricate Victorian-era trim, carved casings, or if you discover asbestos-containing caulk around the trim (common in pre-1980 NB homes). Professionals have specialized tools for complex cuts and experience protecting valuable heritage millwork. For standard ranch or colonial trim in homes built after 1960, this is a manageable DIY task with the right tools and patience.

Need help finding a professional flooring installer who's experienced with older NB homes? New Brunswick Flooring can match you with contractors familiar with heritage home challenges.

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Q3

How important is expansion gap sizing for flooring in NB's Maritime climate?

Expansion gaps are critically important for any floating floor installation in New Brunswick — arguably more so here than anywhere else in Canada outside coastal BC. The province's Maritime climate produces annual indoor humidity swings of 30–50% between the bone-dry heating season and the humid summers, and every floating floor material responds to these swings by expanding and contracting. Without properly sized expansion gaps, that movement has nowhere to go, and the result is buckling, peak-tenting, or permanent damage to your floor.

Most manufacturers specify **8–12mm (roughly 5/16 to 1/2 inch) expansion gaps** around all walls, door frames, pipes, cabinets, islands, and any other fixed object. In New Brunswick, you should always target the **upper end of that range — 10–12mm minimum**. Here is why: during NB's winter heating season (October through April), forced-air heating can drop indoor humidity to 20–30%, causing floating floors to contract. Come June through September, Maritime humidity pushes indoor levels above 60–65% without air conditioning, and those same planks expand significantly. A gap that looks generous in January may be completely compressed by July. If the floor runs out of room to expand, it pushes against walls and door frames, and the only place it can go is up — creating visible buckles and peaks in the middle of your floor.

Expansion gaps are needed around every fixed object, not just walls. This is a common mistake in NB open-concept homes where a kitchen island or built-in cabinet sits in the middle of a large floor area. The flooring must have a gap around the base of every island, support post, and plumbing penetration. For pipes, drill the hole at least 20mm larger than the pipe diameter and cover with an escutcheon plate. For kitchen islands, use quarter-round or shoe moulding to conceal the gap while still allowing movement.

For **laminate flooring**, the HDF core absorbs and releases moisture more aggressively than vinyl, making expansion gaps even more critical. NB installers often recommend going to 12–15mm for laminate in homes

without consistent humidity control. For **luxury vinyl plank (LVP)**, SPC-core products are more dimensionally stable than laminate, but they still expand and contract with temperature changes — LVP is actually more responsive to temperature than humidity, so gaps matter in rooms with direct sunlight or near heat sources. **Engineered hardwood floated as a click-lock floor** also requires full expansion gaps, and the wood component makes it responsive to both humidity and temperature.

Maximum run lengths are another gap-related consideration that NB's climate makes more important. Most manufacturers specify a maximum continuous run of 30–40 feet in any direction before requiring an expansion break (a T-moulding transition). In NB's high-swing humidity environment, respect these limits strictly — pushing beyond them in a large open-concept space is one of the most common causes of mid-floor buckling.

Practical tips for NB installations: use **spacers during installation** to maintain consistent gaps along walls. Never pin the flooring against a fixed object. When reinstalling baseboards, leave them resting on top of the flooring surface but nail them into the wall only — never nail through the baseboard into the flooring, as this pins the floor and prevents movement. And if you are installing during NB's dry winter months, remember that the floor is at its most contracted state — it will only get wider come summer, so your gaps will shrink. Installing during the shoulder seasons (spring or fall) when humidity is moderate gives you the most balanced starting point.

Q4

What direction should I lay hardwood planks in my New Brunswick home?

The general rule is to lay hardwood planks parallel to the longest wall or the main source of natural light in the room, but structural considerations in your NB home may override aesthetics. Getting the direction right affects how your floor looks, how it performs structurally, and how it handles New Brunswick's significant seasonal humidity swings.

Structural orientation comes first. For nail-down or staple-down hardwood installations over a wood subfloor — the most common method in NB homes — the planks should run perpendicular to the floor joists. This distributes the load across multiple joists and creates a stronger, more stable floor assembly. In most NB homes, floor joists run the short direction of the house (side to side), which means hardwood planks typically run the long direction (front to back). If you are unsure which way your joists run, check the basement or crawl space, or look for the nail lines in your existing subfloor — the nails penetrate the joists and reveal their direction.

If you have a plywood subfloor that is at least 3/4 inch thick and in good condition, you have more flexibility — the plywood provides enough structural support that you can run planks in either direction. This is also true for engineered hardwood installed as a floating floor, which does not fasten to the subfloor at all.

Once structural needs are met, consider aesthetics. Running planks parallel to the longest dimension of a room makes the space feel larger and creates a natural visual flow. In narrow hallways, planks running lengthwise make the hallway feel less cramped. For rooms with a strong natural light source — a large window or sliding door — running planks toward or away from the light minimizes the visibility of seams and surface imperfections. Light hitting planks from the side (perpendicular to the length) highlights every joint and any slight height differences between boards.

In **NB open-concept homes**, which have become increasingly common in newer builds and renovations, maintaining a consistent plank direction throughout the main living area creates a cohesive, spacious feel. Choose the direction based on the dominant visual line — usually front door to back wall or toward the largest window grouping. If your open-concept space has a hallway connecting to bedrooms, continuing the same direction into the hallway and bedrooms creates seamless flow.

A few NB-specific considerations. In older New Brunswick homes — particularly pre-1970s construction common in Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John — the original subfloor may be diagonal board sheathing rather than plywood. Diagonal subfloors actually allow hardwood to run in any direction, which gives you full aesthetic freedom. However, these old board subfloors often need a 3/8-inch plywood overlay ($1.50–$3.00 per square foot) before hardwood installation to create a flat, stable nailing surface.

For homes on crawl spaces or pier foundations — still common in rural NB and older neighbourhoods — the subfloor may have subtle unevenness from frost heave and seasonal movement. Running planks perpendicular to the joists helps bridge minor imperfections and creates a stiffer floor assembly that resists deflection.

Avoid running planks parallel to a long, prominent wall if that wall is not perfectly straight — the gap between the first row and the wall will vary visibly and look like a poor installation. In older NB homes where walls are rarely perfectly square, snap a chalk line parallel to the room's centre line and work outward in both directions, trimming the first and last rows to split any irregularity evenly. This is one of the reasons professional installation ($3–$6 per square foot for labour) is worth considering for hardwood — experienced installers know how to handle the quirks of New Brunswick's older housing stock.

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Q5

How do I handle transitions between different flooring types in an open-concept NB home?

Transitions between different flooring types need careful planning in an open-concept NB home, both for appearance and to accommodate the seasonal expansion and contraction that New Brunswick's Maritime humidity swings demand. Every change in flooring material requires a transition strip, and choosing the right type, placement, and installation method makes the difference between a polished result and an eyesore that also trips people.

The most common transitions in NB open-concept homes are **hardwood or engineered hardwood in living areas meeting tile in kitchens or bathrooms, and LVP meeting carpet in bedrooms.** Each combination has a specific transition strip profile designed for it. A **T-moulding** joins two floors of equal height — this is the standard for

hardwood-to-LVP or laminate-to-laminate transitions. A **reducer strip** transitions from a thicker floor (like 3/4-inch hardwood) down to a thinner one (like LVP or laminate). An **end cap** finishes a floor edge at a doorway or step-down. These strips cost $15–$50 each installed, and quality matters — cheap plastic T-mouldings crack and discolour within a few years, while matching wood or aluminium strips last the life of the floor.

Placement is the first decision. In an open-concept layout, transitions should fall at natural visual break points — ideally at doorway thresholds, under closed doors, or where a room's function clearly changes (where the kitchen meets the living room, for example). Avoid placing transitions in the middle of a visible sightline or in high-traffic pathways where they will catch feet. In NB homes being renovated from traditional closed-room layouts to open-concept, the old wall locations often provide natural transition points even after the wall is removed.

Expansion management is critical at transitions in NB. Where two different floating floors meet, each floor needs its own independent expansion gap — you cannot simply butt two floating floors against each other. The T-moulding sits above the gap and allows both floors to move independently underneath. This is especially important in New Brunswick because the 30–50% annual humidity swing means both floors are expanding and contracting throughout the year. A T-moulding installed over a 12mm gap in January (when floors are contracted) may see that gap shrink to nearly zero by August. Size your gaps for summer expansion, not winter appearance.

Where a **floating floor meets a fixed floor** (like nailed hardwood meeting glued-down tile), the fixed floor does not move but the floating floor does. Use a transition strip fastened to the subfloor on the fixed-floor side, with the floating floor sliding freely underneath the strip's lip. Never fasten a transition strip through a floating floor — this pins the floor and causes buckling.

For same-material transitions across large open-concept areas, most manufacturers require an expansion break (T-moulding) every 30–40 feet of continuous run. In a large NB open-concept main floor, this means you may need a mid-room transition even with a single flooring type. Plan this break at a logical location — a hallway entrance, the edge of a kitchen island, or under a transition between rooms — rather than letting it fall awkwardly in the middle of a living space.

Height differences between flooring types are common and need attention. Hardwood at 3/4 inch, LVP at 5–8mm, and tile at 3/8 to 1/2 inch (plus thin-set) rarely match up perfectly. A reducer strip handles modest height differences smoothly, but differences greater than about 12mm may require building up the lower floor with additional underlayment or plywood to minimize the step. Flush transitions always look more professional than steep ramps, and they are safer for foot traffic.

For the best results in an NB open-concept renovation, plan all your flooring transitions during the design phase — before any materials are purchased. An experienced flooring installer can map out transition locations, specify the correct strip profiles, and ensure expansion gaps are properly sized for Maritime humidity conditions. Getting

matched with a professional through New Brunswick Flooring is free and helps ensure these details are handled correctly from the start.

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Q6

What tools do I need for a DIY laminate flooring installation in NB?

A DIY laminate flooring installation requires a modest set of tools that most NB homeowners can acquire for $100–$250 total, and many you may already own. Click-lock laminate is one of the most DIY-friendly flooring options available, designed specifically for installation without specialized professional equipment. Here is what you need and why each tool matters.

Essential Tools

For measuring and planning: a tape measure, a carpenter's square (for marking straight crosscuts), a pencil, and spacers for maintaining expansion gaps along walls. In New Brunswick, you want **10–12mm spacers** — larger than the 8mm minimum that many guides suggest, because NB's Maritime humidity swings demand extra room for summer expansion. You can buy plastic spacers or simply cut pieces of 1/2-inch plywood.

For cutting: a mitre saw or circular saw with a fine-tooth blade (60+ teeth) is the most efficient option for crosscuts. A jigsaw handles curved cuts around door frames, pipes, and obstacles. If you do not own a power saw, a sharp hand saw with a mitre box works for small installations but will slow you down considerably on larger projects. Always cut laminate face-up with a table saw or mitre saw, and face-down with a circular saw or jigsaw — this keeps chipping on the hidden side.

For installation: a tapping block and pull bar are the two laminate-specific tools you need. The tapping block (a purpose-made plastic block, not a scrap piece of laminate) lets you tap planks together along their long edge without damaging the click-lock profile. The pull bar hooks over the end of a plank and lets you tap the last plank in each row tight against its neighbour when there is no room to swing a tapping block. A rubber mallet provides the gentle force needed — never use a regular hammer directly on laminate.

For subfloor prep: a long straightedge or 6-foot level to check your subfloor for flatness (must be within 3/16 inch over 10 feet), a utility knife for cutting underlayment, and duct tape or the manufacturer's recommended tape for sealing underlayment seams. A moisture metre is strongly recommended in New Brunswick — testing your subfloor moisture content before installation costs under $50 for a pin-type metre and can save you from a failed installation, especially in NB basements and ground-level rooms.

For finishing: a multi-tool (oscillating cutter) is extremely useful for undercutting door casings and trim so the laminate slides underneath rather than requiring an ugly notch. A utility knife and caulking gun finish the job for any silicone expansion joint filling. A pry bar helps with removing existing baseboards, and a nail gun or finish nailer makes reinstalling them quick and clean.

For NB-specific conditions, a hygrometer (humidity gauge) costing $15–$30 is a worthwhile addition. Place it in the installation room a week before starting to monitor indoor humidity levels. If humidity is below 35% (common during NB's heating season from October through April) or above 55% (common in Maritime summers without air conditioning), adjust conditions before installing. Laminate that is installed in extreme humidity conditions may gap or buckle as conditions normalize.

A few practical tips for NB DIY installers. Acclimate your laminate in the room where it will be installed for at least 48 hours before starting — leave the unopened boxes flat on the floor in the room at normal living temperature and humidity. Start your installation along the straightest wall, typically an exterior wall. Stagger end joints by at least 12 inches between adjacent rows for both structural strength and appearance. And work in manageable sections, especially on your first project — most NB homeowners can complete 100–150 square feet per day on their first laminate installation.

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Q7

How long should I wait to put furniture back after hardwood installation in NB?

For prefinished hardwood, you can place furniture back within 24 hours of installation completion. For site-finished hardwood (sanded and finished on-site), wait a minimum of 72 hours — and ideally 5–7 days — before moving furniture back. The difference comes down to whether the finish has already cured before the wood arrived in your home, and New Brunswick's seasonal humidity conditions can extend these timelines.

Prefinished hardwood — both solid and engineered — arrives with its factory finish already fully cured under controlled UV or heat conditions. Once it is installed, you are really just waiting for the installation to settle, not for any finish to dry. You can walk on prefinished hardwood immediately after installation, and light furniture (dining chairs, coffee tables, bookshelves) can go back within 24 hours. For heavy furniture like sofas, pianos, and loaded bookshelves, give it a full 24 hours so the flooring has time to adjust to its final position, especially for nail-down installations where the fasteners need to fully seat.

Site-finished hardwood is a completely different situation. After sanding and applying stain and polyurethane on-site, the finish needs time to cure — and curing is not the same as drying. A water-based polyurethane may feel dry to the touch within 2–4 hours, but full cure takes 7–14 days. Oil-based polyurethane takes even longer — surface dry in 24 hours, but full cure requires 14–30 days. During this curing period, the finish is soft and vulnerable to dents, scratches, and impressions from furniture legs and heavy objects.

The practical minimum for moving furniture back onto site-finished floors is **72 hours for water-based poly and 5–7 days for oil-based poly**. Even at these timelines, use felt pads under every furniture leg to prevent impressions. Avoid placing area rugs for at least two weeks — trapping solvents under a rug can discolour or soften the finish. And never drag furniture across a newly finished floor — always lift and place.

New Brunswick's climate adds important considerations. During the heating season (October through April), indoor humidity in NB homes commonly drops to 20–30%, and the dry air actually helps polyurethane cure faster. However, if your installer applied the finish during a cold, dry period and you then open windows during a spring warm spell, the sudden humidity change can cause the finish to cloud or orange-peel. Maintain stable temperature (18–22°C) and humidity (35–50%) during the entire curing period.

Conversely, during NB's **humid summer months** (June through September), high indoor humidity can significantly slow cure times. Water-based polyurethane that would cure in 7 days during winter may need 10–14 days in a humid Maritime July without air conditioning. If you are having floors finished during summer, run a dehumidifier or AC to keep indoor humidity below 55% — this helps the finish cure properly and prevents moisture-related issues like bubbling or adhesion failure.

Practical steps for protecting your new hardwood. Before moving any furniture back, clean the floor thoroughly to remove dust and debris that could scratch under furniture legs. Apply quality felt pads (not the cheap self-adhesive ones that fall off — use nail-on felt pads for heavy pieces) to every chair, table, and furniture leg. Use wide, flat furniture coasters under heavy pieces like sofas and bookcases to distribute weight. Place walk-off mats at exterior doors to catch NB's seasonal grit, sand, and salt. And for the first month, be especially careful with rolling office chairs, pet claws, and high heels — these concentrate force on small points and are the leading causes of finish damage on new hardwood.

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Q8

What is the best method to cut tile for floor installation without chipping?

The best method to cut tile cleanly without chipping depends on the type of cut — straight cuts are best made with a wet tile saw, while a quality manual snap cutter handles simple straight cuts on ceramic and thinner porcelain. Chipping (also called spalling) happens when the cutting tool tears material from the tile surface rather than slicing through it cleanly, and using the right tool and technique for each cut type eliminates the problem.

A wet tile saw is the single most important tool for chip-free tile cutting. These saws use a diamond-impregnated blade spinning through a constant stream of water, which cools the blade, lubricates the cut, and washes away dust and debris. The water is what prevents chipping — a dry diamond blade generates heat and friction that fractures the tile's glazed surface. For floor tile work in an NB home, you can rent a quality wet tile saw from most NB tool rental shops for $50–$80 per day. A tabletop model handles most residential work, but for large-format tiles (12x24 inches or larger, which are increasingly popular in NB bathroom and kitchen renovations), you

need a sliding tray or bridge-style saw that accommodates the full tile length.

Key techniques for chip-free cuts with a wet saw: Always cut with the tile face-up so the blade enters the glazed surface first — any minor chipping happens on the back where it is hidden in the thin-set. Feed the tile into the blade slowly and steadily — rushing causes the blade to grab and chip. Let the blade do the work; applying heavy downward pressure fractures the surface. Keep the water reservoir full and the blade spray functioning — a dry blade on porcelain will chip immediately. Use a fresh or well-maintained blade; worn blades with missing diamond segments chip rather than slice.

For straight cuts on ceramic tile and thinner porcelain (up to about 10mm thick), a quality manual snap cutter produces clean results quickly and without water or electricity. Score the tile surface in a single firm pass with the tungsten carbide wheel, then snap along the score line. The key is **one confident scoring pass** — going back and forth weakens the glaze unevenly and causes chipping. Quality snap cutters from brands like Rubi or Sigma cost $100–$300 and are worth the investment over cheap $30 models that score inconsistently.

For curved cuts, notches, and L-shaped cuts around door frames and toilet flanges, use an angle grinder fitted with a continuous-rim diamond blade (not a segmented blade — segmented rims chip tile aggressively). Mark your cut line clearly, cut from the face side, and go slowly. An angle grinder is a more aggressive tool than a wet saw, so practice on scrap tiles first. Wear safety glasses, hearing protection, and a dust mask — dry cutting tile produces fine silica dust that is hazardous to inhale.

For small cutouts and holes (such as around pipes and floor drains), a diamond-grit hole saw attached to a drill works well for circular cuts. Keep the tile wet during drilling — either drill in a shallow pan of water or have a helper trickle water over the cutting point. For rectangular cutouts, drill corner holes with a diamond bit and connect them with the angle grinder.

A few NB-specific notes. Porcelain tile, which is denser and harder than ceramic, is the preferred choice for NB bathrooms, kitchens, and entryways because of its superior moisture resistance and durability. However, its density makes it harder to cut cleanly — a wet saw is essentially mandatory for porcelain, and snap cutters only work on thinner porcelain tiles. If your project involves natural stone tile (slate is popular in NB entryways), stone cuts differently than manufactured tile — it tends to fracture along natural grain lines, so wet-saw cuts with a slow feed rate are essential.

Tile floor installation is one of the trades where professional results are difficult to achieve without experience. If your project involves a full room of porcelain tile, consider that professional installation at $6–$12 per square foot includes proper substrate preparation that accounts for the majority of the job's long-term success.

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Q9

How do I install flooring around kitchen cabinets and islands in my NB home?

The correct approach depends on whether the flooring is going in before or after the cabinets, and whether you are using a floating floor (laminate, LVP, click-lock engineered) or a fastened floor (nail-down hardwood, glue-down vinyl, tile). Getting this wrong in a New Brunswick kitchen can lead to buckling floors, trapped cabinets, or expensive rework — especially given NB's significant seasonal humidity swings that cause flooring to expand and contract more than in drier provinces.

For floating floors (laminate, LVP, floating engineered hardwood) in an existing kitchen with cabinets already installed, the flooring must stop short of the cabinets with a proper expansion gap of 10–12mm. This gap is concealed by the toe-kick panel at the base of the cabinet. Slide the flooring up to the cabinet face, maintaining your gap, and reinstall the toe-kick over the flooring edge. If the cabinets do not have removable toe-kicks, use quarter-round moulding or shoe moulding along the base to cover the expansion gap. The critical rule: **never slide floating flooring underneath fixed cabinets or islands.** A floating floor must be free to expand and contract in all directions. Pinning it under a heavy cabinet prevents movement and causes buckling — a problem that is amplified in NB because our Maritime humidity swings create more expansion and contraction than most other provinces.

For a **kitchen island**, the same principle applies. Run the floating flooring around the island with a 10–12mm expansion gap on all four sides, then cover the gap with shoe moulding or the island's trim panel. Some installers in NB use silicone caulk (colour-matched) instead of moulding for a cleaner look — the flexible silicone compresses and stretches with seasonal movement.

For nail-down hardwood or glue-down flooring with cabinets already installed, you have more flexibility because fastened floors are mechanically secured to the subfloor and do not rely on free movement. You can run

hardwood right up to the cabinet face with a minimal gap (3–5mm for nail-down solid hardwood) covered by shoe moulding. The expansion and contraction in a fastened floor is managed by the cumulative small movements across the entire field rather than at the perimeter.

If you are renovating and cabinets are being removed and reinstalled, the ideal approach is to install the flooring first across the entire kitchen floor, then set the cabinets on top. This method works beautifully for **tile and fastened hardwood** because the flooring is secured to the subfloor and can bear the weight of cabinets without movement issues. It also makes future cabinet replacement or modification much simpler — you do not have to match flooring under and around updated cabinets.

However, **never install cabinets on top of a floating floor.** The weight of loaded upper and lower cabinets — which can easily exceed 1,000 lbs for a full kitchen — pins the floating floor and prevents the expansion and contraction it needs. In New Brunswick specifically, a floating floor pinned under kitchen cabinets is almost guaranteed to buckle during the humid summer months when the floor expands and has nowhere to go.

For tile around existing cabinets, use a multi-tool (oscillating cutter) to undercut the toe-kick by the thickness of the tile plus thin-set (typically 12–15mm). Slide the tile under the toe-kick for a clean, professional finish. Tile does not require an expansion gap in the same way floating floors do — the grout joints provide sufficient accommodation for tile's minimal movement.

Practical NB kitchen flooring tips. Measure around islands and cabinet runs carefully before ordering materials — kitchens have the most cutting waste of any room due to all the obstacles, so add 12–15% waste factor to your material order rather than the standard 10%. Protect finished cabinet faces during installation with painter's tape and cardboard. And for NB homes where the kitchen opens into a dining or living area, plan your transition strips at the kitchen boundary during the design phase, not as an afterthought. Getting matched with an experienced flooring installer through New Brunswick Flooring can help ensure these kitchen-specific details are handled properly from the start.

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Q10

Should I remove baseboards before flooring installation in my NB home?

Yes, removing baseboards before flooring installation is the recommended approach for a clean, professional result in most NB homes. While it is possible to leave baseboards in place and cover the expansion gap with quarter-round or shoe moulding afterward, removing them first gives you a much better finished look and avoids the layered appearance that quarter-round creates.

When you remove baseboards before installation, you gain two important advantages. First, you can run the flooring right up to the wall framing (leaving the required 8-12mm expansion gap hidden behind the baseboard when it goes back on), which eliminates the need for additional trim pieces. Second, you get the chance to inspect the bottom of your walls for moisture damage, mould, or air leaks — something that matters in older NB homes where Maritime humidity can cause hidden problems behind trim.

To remove baseboards without damaging them, score the paint line along the top edge with a utility knife first, then use a thin pry bar and a putty knife behind it to protect the drywall. Number each piece on the back with a pencil so you know exactly where it goes when you reinstall. In many pre-1970s NB homes, baseboards may be painted or caulked heavily after decades of repainting — take your time and expect some touch-up work afterward.

If your baseboards are in poor condition or you are planning to replace them anyway, removal is a no-brainer. New baseboards installed over fresh flooring give the sharpest finished look. Budget $2-$4 per linear foot for new MDF or pine baseboards plus paint, or $4-$8 per linear foot for stained hardwood baseboard that matches your new floor.

If you choose to leave baseboards in place, you will need to install quarter-round or shoe moulding along the bottom edge to cover the expansion gap between the flooring and the baseboard. This is a perfectly acceptable approach and saves labour, but it does change the trim profile of the room. Quarter-round runs about $1-$2 per linear foot for materials. The key concern in NB is making sure the expansion gap behind the quarter-round is still a full 8-12mm — our Maritime humidity swings from winter lows of 20-30% to summer highs above 60% cause more expansion and contraction than most inland provinces, so undersized gaps lead to buckling during humid summer months.

For tile installations, baseboards should always come off because tile requires a rigid, precise edge that cannot be hidden with quarter-round. For floating floors like laminate, LVP, or engineered hardwood, either approach works, but removal produces the better result.

If you are hiring a professional installer, discuss baseboard removal upfront — some installers include it in their quote, while others charge $2-$4 per linear foot extra for removal and reinstallation. Getting this sorted before work

begins avoids surprises on installation day.

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Q11

What is the proper way to stagger flooring planks for the best look?

Proper stagger means offsetting the end joints of adjacent rows by at least 6 inches (150mm), with a random pattern that avoids repeating joint locations within 2-3 rows. This is not just about appearance — correct stagger is a structural requirement for floating floors because it distributes mechanical stress across the locking system and prevents weak lines that can separate under NB's seasonal humidity swings.

The general rule is to maintain a minimum end-joint offset of 6 inches between planks in adjacent rows, but 8-12 inches or more is even better for wider planks. Many manufacturers specify their own minimum stagger in the installation instructions — always check, because failing to follow the stated requirement can void your warranty. For engineered hardwood and laminate planks in the common 48-inch length range, a 12-inch minimum stagger with random variation looks the most natural.

Avoid the "H-pattern" and the "staircase pattern" — these are the two most common stagger mistakes. The H-pattern happens when joints in every other row line up, creating visible horizontal lines across the floor. The staircase pattern happens when each row is offset by exactly the same amount, creating a diagonal line of joints marching across the room. Both patterns draw the eye to the joints instead of the floor surface.

To achieve a natural random stagger, start the first row with a full plank, the second row with the leftover cut piece from the end of row one (as long as it is at least 8 inches long), and continue this approach. If a cutoff piece is too short (under 8 inches), set it aside and start the next row with a plank cut to a random length — roughly one-third or

two-thirds of a full plank. The goal is variation without a visible pattern.

In NB homes, stagger is especially important for floating floor installations because our 30-50% annual relative humidity swing puts significant stress on click-lock connections. A floor with poor stagger concentrates expansion and contraction forces at aligned joints, increasing the risk of gaps opening during winter drying or edges lifting during summer humidity. Proper random stagger distributes these forces evenly across the entire floor.

Practical tips for a great stagger. Before you start, dry-lay the first 4-5 rows without locking them together and step back to look at the joint pattern from standing height. Adjust as needed before committing. When working with planks that have a repeating visual pattern (common with laminate and LVP), pull planks from multiple boxes and mix them to avoid identical textures appearing side by side. This is called "racking" from the box and it prevents the manufactured look that comes from installing planks in box order.

For DIY installations of click-lock laminate or LVP, stagger is one of the easier details to get right — just stay aware of it as you work and check every few rows. For nail-down hardwood, a professional installer will manage stagger as part of their layout planning, which is one of the reasons hiring an experienced installer pays off for hardwood projects.

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Q12

How do I handle flooring at a doorway threshold between rooms in NB?

Doorway thresholds require a transition strip or a continuous-flow approach depending on whether the flooring material changes between rooms, and getting this detail right is especially important in NB homes where seasonal humidity swings cause significant expansion and contraction. A poorly handled threshold is

one of the most visible signs of amateur installation.

If the **same flooring continues through the doorway** into the next room, the cleanest approach is to run the flooring continuously without a transition strip. This creates a seamless look that makes both rooms feel larger. However, there is an important caveat for floating floors in NB — manufacturer guidelines typically limit continuous floating floor runs to 30-40 feet in any direction before requiring an expansion break. In NB's Maritime climate, where indoor humidity can swing from 20% in January to 65% in August, respecting these limits is critical. If the combined room length exceeds the manufacturer's maximum, you need a T-moulding transition even with the same product.

When flooring materials change between rooms — for example, hardwood in the living room meeting LVP in the kitchen — a transition strip is required. The most common types are **T-mouldings** (for floors at the same height), **reducers** (when one floor is higher than the other), and **thresholds or end caps** (where flooring meets a different surface like tile or carpet). Quality transition strips in NB run $15-$50 each installed, depending on material and style.

For the door frame itself, the flooring should slide underneath the door casing rather than being cut to fit around it. Use an oscillating multi-tool or a hand saw laid flat on a scrap piece of your flooring to undercut the casing and door jamb at the correct height. This creates a tight, professional look with no visible gap. In older NB homes — and there are many pre-1960s homes in Fredericton, Saint John, and Moncton — you may find hardwood casings that are quite thick, so take your time with the undercut.

The expansion gap at doorways is where many DIY installations go wrong. When floating flooring passes through a doorway continuously, the doorway itself is a pinch point. If the flooring fits too tightly against the door frames on both sides, summer expansion has nowhere to go and the floor buckles. Leave the standard 8-12mm gap under the casings where it will be hidden.

For tile-to-other-flooring transitions, a metal or stone threshold strip anchored to the subfloor provides a durable, clean transition. This is common in NB bathrooms where tile meets hallway hardwood or LVP. The threshold also acts as a moisture break, preventing water from migrating from the bathroom into the hallway flooring.

Height differences between rooms are common in NB homes, especially where additions have been built over the decades. A reducer transition strip handles differences up to about 10-15mm cleanly. For larger height differences, the subfloor in the lower room may need to be built up with plywood before the new flooring goes down.

If you are hiring a professional installer, discuss all transitions during the quoting stage — the number of doorways and transition types can significantly affect both the cost and timeline of your project.

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Q13

Can I install new flooring without removing the old floor in my NB home?

In many cases, yes — you can install new flooring directly over existing flooring, but only if the old floor is in solid, flat, and well-bonded condition. This approach saves the labour and cost of removal ($1-$4 per square foot), but it comes with trade-offs that are especially important to consider in NB's Maritime climate.

Installing over existing flooring works well in these situations. Floating floors — click-lock laminate, LVP, or floating engineered hardwood — can be installed over existing vinyl sheet, vinyl tile, laminate, hardwood, or even low-pile carpet tile, provided the surface is flat, clean, and structurally sound. The old floor essentially becomes part of the subfloor. This is the most common overlay scenario in NB renovations and it works reliably as long as you add the appropriate underlayment with a built-in vapour barrier.

New tile can be installed over existing tile if the old tile is firmly bonded, the surface is properly roughened or primed, and the combined height does not create problems at doorways. A bonding primer and modified thinset are essential for tile-over-tile installations.

However, there are situations where you must remove the old floor first. If the existing floor is bouncy, soft, water-damaged, or has mould growth underneath, covering it up just hides the problem and the new floor will eventually fail. In NB, where basement moisture, spring snowmelt, and coastal humidity create persistent dampness, covering a moisture-damaged floor is particularly risky — trapped moisture beneath the new surface accelerates mould growth and structural deterioration.

If the old flooring is **pre-1986 vinyl tile or sheet vinyl**, do NOT remove it yourself without testing for asbestos first. Asbestos testing costs just $25-$50 per sample at an NB-certified lab. If asbestos is present, you have two options: hire a licensed abatement professional to remove it safely, or encapsulate it by installing the new flooring over top (which is often the safer and more cost-effective choice as long as the old vinyl is flat and well-bonded).

The height issue is the biggest practical concern with overlay installations in NB homes. Each layer of flooring adds 8-15mm of height, which can cause problems at doorway transitions, under appliances (especially dishwashers and refrigerators that slide under counter overhangs), and at exterior door thresholds where proper weather sealing is critical for NB's harsh winters. Plan to trim doors, adjust appliance clearances, and install appropriate transition strips before starting.

For NB basements specifically, installing over old floor coverings on a concrete slab requires extra caution. Even if the old vinyl or carpet looks fine on top, moisture may be migrating through the concrete underneath. Pull back a section, tape a piece of plastic sheeting to the concrete for 48-72 hours, and check for condensation underneath. NB's high water table and spring snowmelt push moisture through basement slabs year-round, and trapping that

moisture under multiple floor layers creates serious mould risk.

The bottom line: overlay installation is a legitimate, cost-saving approach when conditions are right, but it requires honest assessment of the existing floor's condition. If you are unsure about the state of your subfloor or the old flooring, having a professional flooring installer assess the situation before you commit is well worth the cost of a site visit. New Brunswick Flooring can match you with local flooring professionals for a free estimate on your project.

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Q14

How do I install flooring on stairs in a New Brunswick home?

Stair flooring installation is one of the most technically demanding flooring projects and is almost always a job for a professional installer, regardless of the material you choose. Each step is a small, precise project involving exact measurements, custom cuts for treads and risers, proper nosing installation, and secure attachment — the consequences of poor stairway flooring include tripping hazards and premature wear.

Hardwood stair treads are the most popular choice in NB homes and deliver a beautiful, durable result that can last decades with proper care. Pre-made hardwood stair treads (red oak, white oak, or maple) run $30-$80 per tread in NB, with risers at $15-$30 each. Installation labour runs $40-$80 per step, so a standard 13-step staircase costs roughly $1,500-$3,000 fully installed with matching nosing. Each tread must be custom-fitted to the stringer width, glued and nailed with precision, and finished with a bullnose or flush nosing at the front edge.

In NB's Maritime climate, hardwood stair treads experience the same humidity-driven expansion and contraction as hardwood floors. **Proper acclimation — 5-10 days in your home's living conditions — is just as critical for**

stair treads as for floor planks. During NB's winter heating season when indoor humidity drops to 20-30%, minor gaps may appear between treads and risers. A whole-home humidifier maintaining 35-45% relative humidity during heating season helps minimize this movement.

LVP on stairs is growing in popularity across NB for its durability, waterproof properties, and lower cost. LVP stair installations require each plank to be glued directly to the stair substrate — the click-lock floating method used on flat floors does not work on stairs. Specialty stair nosing pieces designed for LVP are essential for a safe, finished edge. Expect to pay $25-$50 per step for materials plus $30-$60 per step for professional installation.

Carpet on stairs remains a practical choice for NB homes, especially for noise reduction and warmth during long winters. Professional carpet installers use a waterfall or cap-and-band method, stretching and stapling carpet tightly around each tread and riser. Budget $15-$30 per step for materials and $20-$40 per step for installation. Carpet runners over finished hardwood stairs offer the best of both worlds — the beauty of hardwood with added traction and noise dampening.

Key considerations for NB stair installations. Many older NB homes — particularly pre-1970s houses in Saint John, Fredericton, and Moncton — have stairs with uneven riser heights or non-standard tread depths. A professional installer will measure every step individually because even small variations affect safety and appearance. Building code requires consistent riser heights within 3/8 inch across a staircase, so significant variations may need correction before new treads go on.

Safety is the overriding priority with stair flooring. Loose treads, inadequate nosing, and slippery finishes on stairs are genuine fall hazards, particularly in homes with young children or older adults. Any stair flooring material must be securely fastened (never floating), and the nosing must provide a visible, slip-resistant edge.

This is a project where hiring an experienced professional is strongly recommended. A poorly installed stair floor is not just unattractive — it is dangerous. New Brunswick Flooring can match you with local installers experienced in stairway flooring for a free estimate.

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Q15

What is the best time of year to install new flooring in New Brunswick?

Late summer through mid-fall — roughly August through October — is the ideal window for flooring installation in New Brunswick. During this period, NB's indoor humidity levels are naturally settling into the moderate 40-55% range, temperatures are mild enough that homes are neither running heavy heat nor sealed up tight, and basement moisture from spring snowmelt has subsided.

The reason timing matters so much in NB comes down to our Maritime climate's dramatic humidity swings. Indoor conditions in an NB home can range from 20-30% relative humidity during winter heating season to 60%+ during muggy summer months. **Any wood-based flooring — solid hardwood, engineered hardwood, or standard-core laminate — responds to these swings by expanding and contracting.** Installing during a humidity extreme means the flooring acclimates and is fastened at one end of the moisture spectrum, then moves significantly when conditions shift to the other end.

Fall installation advantages. By September and October, NB homes have moderate, stable humidity without the extremes of winter drying or summer dampness. Hardwood and engineered hardwood acclimate to mid-range moisture content, meaning seasonal movement in both directions is minimized. The soil around your foundation has dried from spring snowmelt, so basement slab moisture is at its annual lowest — making fall the safest time for basement flooring projects of any type.

Winter installation (November through March) is the trickiest period for wood-based flooring in NB. Forced-air heating drops indoor humidity dramatically, and hardwood delivered from a cold warehouse needs extended acclimation time in your heated home — potentially 7-14 days rather than the standard 5-7. If hardwood is installed at winter's low moisture content, it may expand and buckle when summer humidity arrives. Professional installers account for this by leaving slightly larger expansion gaps during winter installations, but the risk of excessive seasonal movement is still higher. **LVP and tile are unaffected by humidity and can be installed year-round without concern.**

Spring installation (April through June) brings NB's snowmelt season, which raises the water table and pushes moisture through basement concrete slabs. Avoid basement flooring projects during this period if possible. Main-floor and upper-floor installations are fine in spring, though hardwood acclimation needs extra attention as indoor humidity is rising quickly.

Summer installation (July through August) works well for most products, but be aware that NB's Maritime humidity can push indoor levels above 60% without air conditioning. If you are installing hardwood during a humid stretch, run a dehumidifier or AC to keep indoor conditions in the 40-55% range during acclimation and installation.

For waterproof products like LVP, SPC-core flooring, porcelain tile, and carpet, the season matters much less because these materials do not respond to humidity changes. You can schedule these installations whenever it is convenient. However, if you are installing over a concrete basement slab, late summer through fall remains the best timing because slab moisture levels are lowest.

Practical scheduling tip: NB flooring installers tend to be busiest from September through November as homeowners rush to complete projects before winter. Book your installer 4-6 weeks ahead for fall installation to secure your preferred dates. Getting matched with a flooring professional early through New Brunswick Flooring can help you lock in the timing that works best for your project.

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Q16

How do I prepare my NB home before the flooring installers arrive?

Good preparation before your flooring installers arrive saves time, reduces costs, and helps ensure a smooth installation day. Most professional installers in NB appreciate — and some require — that homeowners handle certain prep tasks before the crew shows up. Here is what to take care of.

Clear the rooms completely. Move all furniture, area rugs, lamps, electronics, and personal items out of the installation area. Most installers charge $50-$200 per room for furniture moving, so handling this yourself saves real money. Heavy items like pianos, pool tables, and large appliances may require professional movers. If your installation covers multiple rooms, move everything to rooms that are not being done, or into the garage or a storage unit. In NB winters, be careful about storing heat-sensitive items in unheated garages where temperatures drop well below freezing.

Remove existing flooring if agreed upon. Check your contract — some installers include removal in their quote, while others expect you to handle it or charge extra ($1-$4 per square foot). If you are removing old carpet yourself, cut it into manageable strips with a utility knife, roll them up, and dispose of them. **Important: if your NB home was built before 1986 and has vinyl tile or sheet vinyl, do NOT remove it without testing for asbestos first.** Testing costs $25-$50 per sample, and if asbestos is present, removal must be done by a licensed abatement professional.

Remove baseboards and door casings if your installer requests it. Many installers prefer baseboards removed beforehand so they can run flooring to the wall and reinstall baseboards over top for a clean finish. Number each piece on the back with a pencil for easy reinstallation. Save any quarter-round or shoe moulding separately.

Ensure the acclimation period is complete. If you are having hardwood or engineered hardwood installed, your installer may have delivered materials 5-10 days early to acclimate in your home. Make sure the boxes have been stored in the rooms where they will be installed (not in the garage or basement), at your home's normal living temperature and humidity. In NB, where winter indoor humidity drops to 20-30%, this acclimation period is especially critical — never store hardwood in a cold, damp garage or an unheated room before installation.

Set your home's climate. Run your heating or cooling system to maintain normal living conditions — ideally 18-24 degrees Celsius with 35-55% relative humidity. In NB's winter, this means your furnace and humidifier should be running. In summer, air conditioning or a dehumidifier keeps Maritime humidity in check. The installation area should be at stable conditions for at least 48 hours before the crew arrives.

Make the space accessible. Clear a path from your exterior door to the work area for material delivery. If installers need to carry heavy boxes of hardwood or tile up stairs or through narrow hallways, remove obstacles and protect

walls with cardboard at tight corners. Ensure your driveway or parking area can accommodate a delivery vehicle or installer's van.

Additional details to address. Trim doors to clear the new floor height (or ask your installer to do this). Disconnect and move appliances like refrigerators and stoves if the kitchen floor is being done. Secure pets in a separate area away from the work zone. If you have radiant in-floor heating, confirm with your installer that it has been off for the required period (typically 48 hours before installation).

Taking care of these steps means your installers can focus entirely on delivering a quality floor from the moment they arrive.

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