

# Fixing, Grouting & Sealing Terracotta Tiles



Even the introduction of a correctly mixed cementitious grout to terracotta will result in the moisture being drawn quickly from the grout into the tile, with loss of workability resulting in increased difficulty of application. This can lead first to an unsightly joint as the grout is difficult to finish smoothly, and secondly in a weakening of the joint where the water required for hydration of the cement has been sucked into the tile.

If additional water is added to the mix to counteract this effect, the mix is often too wet to completely fill the joints and the 'slurry' can spill onto the surface of the tile from which it can be very difficult to remove without ruining the look of the system

Once completed a further coat is often applied to give additional protection to both the tile and the grout surface.

If terracotta tiles are sealed while damp, or the subfloor is damp, there is a risk of mildew forming within the tiles. This will appear as black or white marks and spots. When mildew is visible, the sealer should be stripped off and the tiles treated carefully with a bleaching agent.

Recommended Biscem grouts include **Wide Joint grouts** and **Full Joint** rapid setting grout.

Reclaimed terracotta is a specialist product and wide variations in size and depth should be expected. These tiles may have been extensively cleaned and must be allowed sufficient time to dry before sealing

Ceramic tiles are often used to mimic terracotta in appearance. In comparison these have much lower absorption. This should be remembered when finishing the grout as finishing at the same time after application will result in the grout being wetter with the resultant effect of the laitance, or fines, being brought to the surface where they will dry with a characteristic white colour.

**Terracotta** is a raw material used to produce unglazed, red body tiles generally extruded and ½ inch thick or more. The surface appearance may be rustic, smooth, polished or waxed for luster. Terracotta tiles are naturally soft absorbent tiles, and are particularly subject to minor imperfections including soft pockets, surface pitting, chipping, lime popping, together with size, colour and flatness variations.

Terracotta contains various soluble minerals and salts which can be activated by damp and moisture. This may appear as a white stain or 'tide mark' on the surface and should be wiped away with a clean damp cloth. Stubborn efflorescence may be removed with a cement stain remover, such as *HG Extra*, applied with a scouring pad or similar product. Do not soak terracotta tiles during fixing as this may activate efflorescence.

## Adhesives

Fixing terracotta tiles into sand and cement or slow setting adhesives should be avoided because of the time required for the tiles to dry out and the associated problem of efflorescence. With this in mind we recommend the use of rapid setting adhesives such as **Biscem Vitri-Rapid, Vitri-Flex, Vitri-Flow** or **Fast Set**.

## Grouting

After fixing, terracotta tiles should be sealed both over the surface of the tile and down the edges of the tile with two coats of boiled linseed oil, or equivalent material, to partly seal the surface. This will prevent excessive absorption of the water in the grout into the tile and will enable easier cleaning of excess grout from the surface.