

OTTAWA TILING

---

# Kitchen Backsplash Installation

Kitchen backsplash tile guidance for Ottawa homeowners, covering material choices, pattern layouts, grout selection and installation techniques. Get tips on protecting walls behind stoves and sinks.

6 Expert Answers from Tile IQ

[ottawatiling.com/construction-brain](https://ottawatiling.com/construction-brain)

# Table of Contents

---

1. What grout is easiest to keep clean behind an Ottawa kitchen stove where grease splatters?
2. What adhesive do Ottawa tilers recommend for heavy stone backsplash tile on drywall?
3. How do Ottawa installers deal with uneven plaster behind backsplash tile in Lowertown kitchens?
4. How much does it cost to tile a backsplash in an L-shaped Ottawa kitchen with corner cabinet?
5. Is it worth hiring a professional for a simple straight-lay kitchen backsplash in Ottawa or DIY?
6. How much extra does a decorative tile medallion behind the stove cost in an Ottawa kitchen?

Q1

## What grout is easiest to keep clean behind an Ottawa kitchen stove where grease splatters?

**Epoxy grout is by far the easiest to keep clean behind a kitchen stove** because it's completely non-porous, stain-proof, and grease wipes off with just warm soapy water. Unlike cementitious grout, epoxy grout never needs sealing and won't absorb cooking oils, tomato sauce splatters, or other kitchen mess that can permanently stain traditional grout.

In Ottawa kitchens, the area behind the stove sees the heaviest abuse of any backsplash surface. Grease from frying, steam from boiling, and splashes from sauces create a challenging environment that quickly shows dirt and stains on porous grout materials. Standard cementitious grout, even when sealed, will gradually absorb oils and develop a dingy appearance that's difficult to restore. The freeze-dry heating cycles in Ottawa homes during winter can also cause sealed grout to crack slightly, creating microscopic openings where grease can penetrate.

Epoxy grout costs about 50 percent more than cementitious grout (roughly \$3 to \$5 per square foot installed versus \$2 to \$3 for standard grout), but the long-term maintenance savings are substantial. It cleans with ordinary household cleaners, never needs resealing, and maintains its original appearance for decades. The installation window is shorter than cementitious grout - epoxy must be cleaned off tile surfaces within about 30 minutes of application - so it requires an experienced installer who can work efficiently.

If budget constraints make epoxy grout prohibitive, high-quality sanded cementitious grout with a premium penetrating sealer applied annually is the next best option. Choose a grout color that won't show stains as readily - medium grays and earth tones hide cooking residue better than white or very dark grout. Avoid unsanded grout behind stoves regardless of joint width, as it's softer and more prone to staining than sanded varieties.

For Ottawa homeowners planning a kitchen backsplash project, the stove area is worth the investment in epoxy grout even if you use standard grout elsewhere - many tile installers will do a hybrid approach to balance cost and performance where it matters most.

---

Q2

## What adhesive do Ottawa tilers recommend for heavy stone backsplash tile on drywall?

For heavy natural stone backsplash tile on drywall in Ottawa, professional tile installers recommend a high-performance polymer-modified thinset mortar specifically rated for natural stone and wall applications. **Never use**

**mastic adhesive** for stone tile — it's water-soluble, has poor holding strength for heavy materials, and can stain porous stone.

The key considerations for Ottawa installations include our extreme temperature swings and the seasonal humidity changes that cause drywall to expand and contract slightly. Heavy stone tile puts significant stress on the adhesive bond, especially when the substrate moves with seasonal changes. A quality polymer-modified thinset like Mapei Kerabond/Keralastic, Custom Building Products VersaBond, or Laticrete 254 Platinum provides the strong, flexible bond needed to support natural stone on vertical surfaces.

**Proper surface preparation is critical** — the drywall must be primed with a high-quality primer before tiling, and the surface should be clean, dust-free, and structurally sound. For very heavy stone (marble slabs, thick granite, large-format natural stone), many Ottawa installers add mechanical fasteners or consider upgrading the substrate to cement board for additional support, especially for stones over 15 pounds per square foot.

The thinset should be mixed to the consistency of thick peanut butter and applied with the appropriate notched trowel — typically a 1/4" x 3/8" square-notch trowel for most stone backsplash applications. **Back-buttering each stone tile** (applying a thin layer of thinset to the back of the tile) ensures maximum contact and support, which is essential for heavy materials that could sag or fall if the bond fails.

One critical consideration with natural stone is using **white or light-colored thinset** to prevent show-through on light-colored or translucent stones like Carrara marble. Dark gray thinset can telegraph through and muddy the appearance of light stone.

When you're ready to move forward with a stone backsplash installation, you can browse experienced tile contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who understand the specific requirements for heavy stone installations in our climate.

---

Q3

## How do Ottawa installers deal with uneven plaster behind backsplash tile in Lowertown kitchens?

Ottawa tile installers approach uneven plaster walls in Lowertown's heritage homes with a combination of assessment, selective removal, and modern leveling techniques that respect the character of these 100+ year old buildings. The key is determining whether the plaster can be salvaged and leveled or needs to be removed entirely — a decision that depends on the severity of the unevenness and the condition of the underlying lath.

### Assessment and Planning

Lowertown's heritage homes typically feature horsehair plaster over wood lath, which can develop waves, cracks, and hollow spots over decades of settling and moisture cycling through Ottawa's extreme seasons. Professional installers use a 4-foot level and straightedge to map the wall's high and low spots — anything beyond 6 millimeters (1/4 inch) of variation over a meter needs correction before tile installation. They also tap the wall systematically to identify loose or hollow areas where the plaster has separated from the lath.

If the plaster is generally sound with minor undulations, installers will often skim coat the entire wall with a high-quality leveling compound like Mapei Planipatch or Custom Building Products LevelQuik. This creates a flat, uniform surface for tile while preserving the original plaster substrate. For more significant irregularities, they may install 1/4-inch or 1/2-inch cement backer board (Hardiebacker or Durock) over the existing plaster, shimming behind the backer board as needed to achieve a flat plane.

### **Modern Solutions for Heritage Walls**

When plaster is severely damaged, cracked, or pulling away from the lath, the professional approach is selective removal and replacement with appropriate substrates. Many Ottawa installers working in Lowertown will remove plaster only in the backsplash area rather than disturbing entire walls, then install cement backer board or foam backer board (Kerdi-Board) on a shimmed framework that brings the surface flush with the surrounding plaster. This targeted approach minimizes disruption to the heritage character while creating the flat, stable substrate that modern tile requires.

The challenge in these heritage kitchens is often that walls are not plumb or square — corners may be off by several degrees, and what appears to be a straight wall may actually bow or lean. Experienced installers account for this by establishing a new reference plane for the backsplash that may not follow the exact contours of the original wall. They use laser levels and string lines to create a flat installation surface, even if it means the tile sits slightly proud of or recessed from the original plaster at certain points.

### **Critical Considerations**

Never install tile directly over questionable plaster in a wet area like behind a sink — moisture will eventually reach any loose or hollow spots and cause failure. The investment in proper substrate preparation pays for itself many times over compared to the cost of removing failed tile and starting over. Ottawa's humidity swings between winter heating season and summer put additional stress on marginal substrates, making thorough preparation especially important.

Electrical considerations are also crucial in heritage kitchens — many Lowertown homes have knob-and-tube wiring or early cloth-wrapped wiring that may need updating before backsplash installation, especially if under-cabinet lighting or outlets are being added. This work requires an ESA-licensed electrician and often involves opening walls beyond the backsplash area.

When you're ready to tackle a heritage kitchen backsplash project, you can browse experienced tile installers familiar with Lowertown's unique challenges through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at [justynrookcontracting.com/directory](https://justynrookcontracting.com/directory) — look for contractors who specifically mention heritage home experience and proper substrate preparation techniques.

---

#### Q4

## How much does it cost to tile a backsplash in an L-shaped Ottawa kitchen with corner cabinet?

**Kitchen backsplash installation in an L-shaped Ottawa kitchen typically costs \$1,800 to \$4,500 including materials and labour, with the corner cabinet area adding complexity but not dramatically increasing the total cost.** The L-shape configuration actually works in your favour cost-wise since you're tiling two walls that meet at an inside corner rather than multiple separate areas.

The corner cabinet area requires careful planning and precise cuts but doesn't significantly increase labour time compared to straight runs. Most tile installers price backsplash work by total square footage rather than charging extra for corners, though complex patterns or very small mosaic tiles around corners can add 10 to 20 percent to labour costs. In Ottawa's current market, expect to pay \$15 to \$35 per square foot installed depending on your tile selection and pattern complexity.

**Material costs break down as follows:** Standard subway tile or ceramic runs \$3 to \$8 per square foot for materials, mid-range porcelain or natural stone costs \$8 to \$18 per square foot, and premium materials like handmade tile or exotic stone can reach \$25 to \$40 per square foot. Labour typically adds \$8 to \$15 per square foot for straightforward installations, with intricate patterns, small mosaics, or challenging cuts around the corner cabinet pushing labour to \$12 to \$20 per square foot.

A typical L-shaped kitchen backsplash covers 35 to 60 square feet depending on counter length, cabinet height, and whether you're going full-height to the ceiling or stopping at the bottom of upper cabinets. Factor in additional costs for outlet and switch cutouts (\$25 to \$50 each), edge trim or bullnose pieces, and removal of existing backsplash material if needed (\$3 to \$6 per square foot for demolition).

The corner where your L-shaped counters meet requires either mitered cuts for a seamless look or a corner trim piece. Professional installers handle this transition skillfully, ensuring the tile pattern flows naturally around the corner without awkward cuts or misaligned joints. This attention to detail is what separates a professional result from a DIY attempt that looks obviously amateur.

When you're ready to move forward, you can browse experienced tile contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare profiles and get detailed quotes for your specific kitchen layout.

---

#### Q5

## Is it worth hiring a professional for a simple straight-lay kitchen backsplash in Ottawa or DIY?

A simple straight-lay kitchen backsplash with standard subway tile or similar rectangular tile on a flat, sound wall is one of the most DIY-friendly tile projects you can tackle. If you're reasonably handy, have patience for detail work, and the wall behind your backsplash area is in good condition, this can be a satisfying weekend project that saves you \$800 to \$1,500 in labour costs on a typical Ottawa kitchen.

The key factors that make this DIY-suitable are the forgiving nature of straight-lay patterns (no complex cuts or alignment challenges), the small scale (most backsplashes are 15 to 30 square feet), and the fact that it's above counter level where minor imperfections are less noticeable than on floors. Ottawa's climate doesn't significantly impact indoor backsplash work since there's no freeze-thaw exposure, and standard ceramic or porcelain tile with regular thinset adhesive works perfectly for this application.

**However, you should hire a professional if:** your backsplash involves outlets that need to be moved or added (requires an ESA-licensed electrician), the wall surface is uneven or damaged, you're using expensive natural stone that requires pre-sealing and specialized handling, the pattern involves complex cuts around windows or unusual angles, or you're installing a full-height backsplash that extends to the ceiling.

The most common DIY mistakes on backsplashes are poor tile layout planning (ending with tiny slivers at one end), uneven spacing, and inadequate thinset coverage leading to loose tiles over time. Take time to dry-fit your layout with spacers before mixing any adhesive, and remember that thinset has a working time of about 30 minutes in Ottawa's typical indoor conditions.

For a straightforward subway tile backsplash on a good wall, DIY can work well. For anything more complex, or if you want guaranteed professional results, you can browse experienced tile installers through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to get quotes and compare your options.

---

Q6

## How much extra does a decorative tile medallion behind the stove cost in an Ottawa kitchen?

A decorative tile medallion behind the stove typically adds \$300 to \$1,200 to your Ottawa kitchen backsplash project, depending on the medallion's size, complexity, and material. Simple geometric medallions in standard ceramic or porcelain run \$300 to \$600 installed, while elaborate hand-painted designs, natural stone inlays, or large custom patterns can reach \$800 to \$1,200 or more.

The cost premium comes from both materials and labor. Medallion tiles themselves range from \$50 to \$400 depending on size and intricacy, but the real expense is in the installation. Creating a focal point medallion requires precise measurement and layout to center it properly behind the stove, careful cutting of surrounding field tiles to accommodate the medallion's dimensions, and often more complex thinset application for tiles of varying thickness. Many medallions are slightly thicker than standard field tiles, requiring the installer to adjust thinset depth to maintain a flat surface.

**Natural stone medallions** command the highest prices due to material cost and the specialized handling required. Marble or travertine medallions need pre-sealing before installation and careful grouting to avoid staining. **Hand-painted ceramic medallions** fall in the middle range and offer unlimited design possibilities. **Mosaic-style medallions** made from small tiles are labor-intensive to install but create stunning visual impact.

The medallion's size significantly affects cost. A compact 12-inch square medallion might add only \$300 to \$400 to your project, while a dramatic 24-inch or larger centerpiece can easily reach \$800 to \$1,200 installed. Consider that the medallion will be the focal point of your kitchen, so investing in quality materials and professional installation pays dividends in the final result.

When you're ready to explore medallion options and get precise quotes for your kitchen backsplash, you can browse experienced tile installers through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who can show you medallion samples and provide detailed estimates based on your specific design vision.

---

**Disclaimer:** This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Tiling. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any tiling installation or renovation project. Information is current as of May 24, 2026 and may change. Visit [ottawatiling.com](https://ottawatiling.com) for the latest answers.