

Baseboards bridge the gap between the floor and the wallboard, an essential detail with a floating floor such as hardwood or laminate. While baseboards aren't necessary, they do lend a finished look to your floor treatments. This article discusses how to install baseboard molding.

Before You Install Baseboard Molding

In order to properly install baseboard molding, you will need the following items:

- Tape measure
- Compound miter saw, or hand saw and miter box
- Finish nails
- Hammer
- Nailset
- Paintable/stainable wood putty
- Putty knife
- Sandpaper

You'll be making 45-degree cuts at the corners of the baseboard molding. While that can be done with a hand saw and miter box, it can be difficult if you don't have experience using such tools. Instead, buy, borrow or rent a power miter saw. It's well worth it, especially if you intend to install more trim around the house. A compound miter saw is best (it tilts as well as swivels), but you can do without the blade tilt by standing the molding up and cutting it rather than by laying it flat.

How to Install Baseboard Molding

1. Measure the width of each wall carefully and calculate how much molding you will need. Buy about 15% more than what you need so there's enough for test cuts and mistakes.
2. Stain or paint the baseboards before installing. To cut the first piece for inside corners, measure the wall twice (measure twice, cut once) and cut a 45-degree miter sloping away from the board's face at both ends. Nail the baseboard into the wall every 16 inches or so.
3. For the mating piece, use a test scrap and cut a 45-degree angle as you did on the previous board. Test the fit against the installed piece. It's a rare corner that's actually 90 degrees. Most likely, you'll have to increase or decrease the angle setting on your saw or miter box until you find that perfect number that gives you a nice, snug miter joint - that's why you bought extra molding.
4. Next, cut the first joint accordingly on the board that will meet the other baseboard in the corner. Cut the other end at a 45-degree angle, and continue the process around the room.
5. Cut straight butt joints to meet doorframe moldings and built-in furniture pieces such as cabinets.
6. Outside corners will simply have the miter cuts against the back side of the board instead of the front. When measuring for an outside corner, transfer the wall measurement to the back of the board. If it's 6 feet, mark that spot - that's where the blade enters the wood to begin the miter cut from the back, tapering to the front.
7. Go back and tap the nailheads below the surface, filling each with a dab of wood putty.
8. When dry, sand the putty and touch up with a small brush and your paint or stain.

On walls longer than 16 feet, you'll likely have to splice shorter pieces together. To do that, make what's called a scarf joint. A scarf joint entails overlapping 45-degree cuts that are glued and nailed. If shrinkage occurs, it's hardly visible.

For the final touch on your baseboard project, consider installing shoe molding where the baseboard meets the floor. It dresses up the baseboard and, because it's very flexible, covers any gaps from an uneven floor surface.

Tips

- Miter cuts are notorious for opening and leaving gaps. Use a paintable silicone caulk to fill in any openings.
- If the cuts are just a hair long, sand the miter instead of shaving off the excess with the saw