

# Mom's attempt at home improvement goes awry

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I recently spent 10 days on my hands and knees, scrubbing the floor like Cinderella, breathing toxic fumes and sweating like a pig. Why? I'll tell you, but first I have a question of my own.

Why on earth would a builder put carpet in the dining room? Please explain this to me. It's like carpet in the bathroom. It makes no sense whatsoever, especially for a family with five children. Granted, the builder didn't know we'd be buying the home, but still.

For three and a half years, I've shaken my head pretty much every day at the debauchery known as the floor under my dining table. Pulverized strawberries and clumps of oatmeal clinging for dear life to the carpet fibers. An unknown sticky spill of some sort seeping into the mysterious deep beneath. A permanent marker, with the lid off of course, proving that carpet has wicking action. Petrified bananas, at least I think that's what they were, and juice spill-patterns matching the outlines of the table (including seepage between the cracks where the leaf goes).

One night I lay awake in the wee hours, thinking of my floor, and I just couldn't take it anymore. I got up, went to a corner of the dining room behind the hutch, and with a mixture of fear and

elation ripped up the corner of the carpet to see what lay lurking beneath. A slab of cement.

Oh, the possibilities! With our limited budget at the moment, our dream of hardwood floors or ceramic tile was not feasible, but hey, I could buy a can of paint and throw it on that concrete slab! How difficult could it be?

And there you have the 64 million dollar question, one that I never should have ventured to ask. Therein lies a mysterious phenomenon known as "good idea becomes project from hell." Have you ever been there? It goes something like this.

#### DAY ONE: RIPPING AND SHREDDING

I gleefully pull up the offensive carpet in the dining room, rip off the scratched up linoleum in the kitchen. I decide maybe I should go farther - perhaps the hallway, definitely the laundry room. I'm optimistic and excited. This is the beginning of a new, cleaner life. I briefly fancy the idea of a drain in the center of the floor, and a powerful hose with which to swoosh everything down it. Of course that's not feasible.

#### DAY TWO: BEWARE THE INTERNET

I decide to do a little surfing about painting a concrete floor, and I discover the possibility of staining, a process that creates a much more natural, stone-like look. I like it. I want it. I've upped the ante.

#### DAYS THREE THROUGH TEN: SCRUBBING AND DOING ACID

To prepare my concrete, I must etch it with muriatic acid, which basically eats through everything. Everything, that is, but the adhesive residues from the linoleum and carpet, and some paint on the floor. No, it actually binds the adhesives to the concrete, and it doesn't help with the paint.

I scrub and I scrub. First I use a screwdriver and the claw part of a hammer. Then I borrow a large putty knife. I try steel wool and

nylon scrubbers. I buy toxic adhesive and paint removers that don't help. I buy a wire brush. I scrub until my joints hurt and the sweat pours off my face.

My friend's construction-experienced sons come to see what I'm up to. They heard me telling their mom what I'm doing, and they have to come see what the crazy lady is up to. They find me on the floor with my wire brush, scrubbing and muttering to myself, on the verge of tears.

"Soak it with water," they say. I soak it with water. With a little more scrubbing, everything comes off. I was supposed to do this before I did the acid. I learn this on day 10.

The acid leaves residue which needs to be scrubbed off. I get smart and borrow a sander to do this part.

#### DAY ELEVEN: THE FINISH LINE

It takes approximately 20 minutes to spray one gallon of stain on all my prepared concrete and it's over. The floor is a rustic, rosy sandstone color and is sealed and prepared for whatever abuse we can dish out.

I collapse into a post-project coma, one from which my family believes I'll never recover. I sign a document, in blood, that I will never attempt any more home improvement projects.

I haven't mentioned my family's part in all of this. My husband knows me too well and runs the other way when I get into a project frenzy — like when I painted the walls, or put up a tile back-splash in the kitchen, or single-handedly finished the flagstone patio earlier this summer.

The kids went over to generous, accommodating friends' houses to play while I worked. They actually had a really good time, and they probably wish I'd do another project soon. I signed that document, though, and I'm truly done with all things do-it-yourself. But hey, wouldn't it be cool to have an island in the center of that concrete kitchen, with a flagstone countertop perhaps? But then it

wouldn't match the other countertops, so they should be replaced...

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