
Roofing shingles are something that most every homeowner has, but few spend enough time thinking about them. The purpose of roofing shingles are to provide a single layer solution to a leak proof top for a home or structure. Shingles are generally laid out from the bottom edge of the roof upward, with each higher row overlapping the lower row. Traditionally shingles were made of wood and were capped at the top with a row of copper or lead sheeting. In modern shingle roofs this has been replaced by a row of shingles with plastic underlay.

Back to the make up of shingles, wood was considered good. But in time modern materials such as asphalt and asbestos cement replaced wood as common materials. Fiberglass based asphalt shingles are now the most popular shingle used in the United States. The obvious issue with wood is fire, and fire is the reason wood and paper backed shingles are used infrequently in modern construction.

Most people have seen a type of wood shingle, but wouldn't be able to identify it. It's called a shake, which is a wooden shingle made from split logs. Shake roofs were common with log cabins, and with many wood frame homes. They're still in use today, most commonly transported by helicopters, but it wasn't always done that way. Before the invention of helicopters the shakes were tied into packs and trans-

ported by pack animal or even by human power. Often cut in hilly areas, they were carried down the slope with the help of a long line run from the bottom to the top. This line served as a hand hold so people carrying the shake packs wouldn't fall.

The main difference between a shingle and a tile is flexibility. Tiles are generally made from ceramic. They're brittle and ill suited to locations where tree limbs might fall on a roof. Shingles are flexible and therefore better able to stand up to tree limbs. Wood shingles rot, while ceramic tiles don't, but modern materials such as the asbestos base for most shingles don't rot. Another difference is the shape. Shingles are flat, while ceramic tiles commonly have an "S" profile to allow them to interlock for strength.

One of the more unique materials for roof shingles is slate. Because of both cleavage and grain slate can be easily split into thin sheets. Such sheets, the slate shingles, make for an old world look for a roof. Slate roofing shingles are installed by a slater, a tradesman trained to work with slate. The same qualities that make slate excellent for roofing shingles, they are fireproof and an electric insulator, made them useful for early 20th century switchboards and relay controls on large electric motors. Imagine that, making a phone call on your roofing shingles.

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