

Homes & Real Estate

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Choosing green flooring worth the challenge

Consumers have a lot more choices now than a few years ago, but partly because sustainable flooring has evolved so quickly, selecting the best types for your home and getting them installed properly can prove challenging.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

“Green” flooring doesn’t always need to shout, “I’m green!”

Today’s sustainable flooring for homes can be subtle, practical and reasonably priced. Green flooring options can include cork, bamboo, sustainably harvested lumber, salvaged materials and many others.

Consumers have exponentially more choices now than a few years ago. But partly because sustainable flooring has evolved so quickly, selecting the best types for your home and getting them installed properly can prove challenging.

Your choices matter because green-flooring materials conserve resources, helping to prevent climate change.

Green flooring also reduces pollution from manufacturing. Using sustainable materials, along with related green products such as flooring adhesives and finishes, improves indoor air quality as well.

Find it

Make durability your first priority. Nearly any flooring material that lasts for many years, still looks good and does its job can be considered somewhat green. Get recommendations from friends, stores and contractors for durable flooring for specific rooms. Stay away from the cheapest flooring materials.

You’ll conserve the most resources if you keep your existing flooring, so look into refurbishing or refinishing it instead of replacing your floor.

To explore the wide range of green flooring materials, start by visiting websites of stores offering selections of two or more types.

These include national chains Green Depot, Lumber Liquidators, Home Depot and Lowe’s and the Seattle store Greenhome Solutions. Some retailers will send you samples of green flooring products for a nominal fee.

Store websites often provide detailed information about specific brands of green flooring products, along with installation specifications and guidelines. Don’t undertake installation

yourself unless you have experience with the material. Make sure your contractor has material-specific experience as well.

For wood, reclaimed wood, bamboo or cork flooring, try to find products with Forest Stewardship Council certification, which means it has been sustainably produced.

Floor it

Ready for a quick walking tour of sustainable flooring? Let's step on it!

Bamboo. Highly engineered and processed types now available offer increased variety and durability. Seattle-based Bamboo Hardwoods is a major national distributor, with several dealers in the area. Typical price is \$2 —\$10 per square foot.

Cork. Made from the bark of cork oak, so trees (primarily in Portugal and nearby countries) are not killed for harvest. Residual or waste cork is often reclaimed for flooring. Comfortable to stand on, with insulating and sound-absorbing properties. Typical price: \$2 —\$8 per square foot.

Marmoleum. Brand name for the main type of linoleum now available, also known as natural linoleum. (Some vinyl flooring may be called linoleum, but is not.) Made from renewable resources, including linseed oil and tree resins. Typical price: \$3 —\$7 per square foot.

Selected wood. Needs to be from a sustainably managed forest or salvaged wood. EcoTimber is a locally-available major brand of sustainable-wood flooring products. Salvaged flooring sold at area used building materials stores may include vintage hardwood from local school gyms and bowling alleys. Typical price: \$4 —\$11 per square foot.

Other choices. Stone flooring can be green, if mined regionally or salvaged. Concrete that includes recycled or waste materials can be a reasonably priced flooring option; if you paint or stain it, use low-toxic products. Rubber flooring made from old tires may work best in an open room or outdoors due to odor. Recycled-leather flooring tiles look great but may be costly. Typical price: \$3 —\$15 per square foot.

Sustainable flooring shows us it isn't always so easy being green. Attention to detail is crucial — improper installation or the use of sketchy adhesives and finishes can quickly turn a green flooring project un-green. Allow plenty of time for research and finding materials.

The rewards of green flooring make it all worth it. Ideally you will end up with a floor that lasts at least 50 years, enhances your home, and makes it comfy and cozy. That's a solid green foundation to stand on.

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