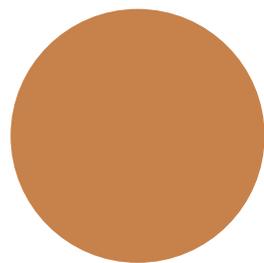
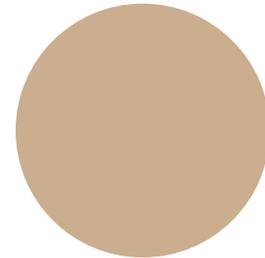
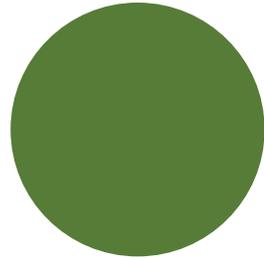


IMPROVEMENT CENTER



Guide to Renewable Flooring Materials

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“Green” is a very popular word these days; it refers to energy efficiency, recycling, reducing the carbon footprint, and generally limiting the use of resources. Being green also means using renewable resources whenever possible, and that can include the flooring we put in our homes.

Renewable Flooring Materials

Although wood and wool are renewable, they are not normally called “green” due to the length of time it takes to grow a tree and the resource usage involved in raising sheep. Here are some of the flooring materials that are most often considered renewable:

1. **Cork:** Once a tree has reached the age of 25-30, the bark can be harvested from the cork oak, and this can be done again about every 10-15 years. The World Floor Covering Association notes that the trees can live for 250 years or more. Because harvesting the bark does not kill the trees, cork is considered a renewable material. It has a soft feel to walk on, but is relatively durable and has good insulation properties.



2. **Bamboo:** This material is of the grass family and grows extremely fast. Because of this rapid growth, bamboo can be sustainably harvested.
3. **Salvaged wood:** This is wood salvaged from old buildings or from trees that were left underwater in lakes formed from dams.

Composition or Construction

Depending on the material, the process used to prepare it for use in your home differs:

- Cork flooring is typically constructed from ground-up cork waste during wine cork manufacture, mixed with a binder. It is put together in layers much like laminate flooring, with a cork underlayment, a cork core, a top layer, and a wear layer of acrylic varnish. A varnished cork floor might need refinishing after about 5 to 10 years.

- Bamboo flooring is manufactured from mature bamboo, which is harvested after approximately six years of growth. The bamboo logs are sliced, and then cut into standard widths. The resulting strips are subjected to pressured steam to remove sugars and insects. Some bamboo is carbonized to give it a darker color. The strips are then kiln-dried, milled, and assembled either vertically or horizontally, glued, and subjected to high heat and pressure to form boards. This material can also be used as the top layer of engineered panels.
- Salvaged wood can be obtained directly from a demolition company, or processed by a recycler. This consists of cleaning, sanding, and in some cases re-sawing and refinishing.
- Cork flooring comes in glue-down squares or click-together tongue and groove planks. Material costs could range from \$2 to \$10 a square foot depending on the thickness, color, and finish. Add approximately \$3 a square foot for installation.
- Salvaged wood flooring varies considerably in price depending on the type of wood and the amount of processing required. You can find oak for as little as \$4 a square foot and teak for as high as \$25, with a wide range of pricing in between. You can install it yourself or you can get a custom quote from a flooring contractor.

Prices

These ballpark estimates offer an idea of costs:

- Unfinished low-end bamboo can range from \$1.50 to \$3.50 a square foot. Professional installation could add another \$3 to \$6 per square foot. For better quality bamboo, the material costs range from \$4 to \$7 a square foot, with no change in installation price. The highest quality bamboo costs from \$7 to \$16 and up per square foot. This grade is manufactured with a strand-woven process using shredded bamboo, and has more layers of wear coating.



Installation Tips

As an extra eco-friendly benefit, cork and bamboo can be finished with water-based products, and you can install them with adhesives that are low in volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions. Here are installation tips:

- Lay bamboo flooring over existing flooring or over a sub-floor. Depending on the subfloor, a number of fastening methods are recommended: staple, nail, glue, or click-together tongue and groove planks. A floating installation is only recommended for wider engineered bamboo floors. The average installation should be within the skills of a reasonably handy homeowner.
- Cork comes in either glue-down squares or click-together tongue and groove boards. The squares require meticulous sub-floor preparation and installation is very time-consuming. The boards are easier to install – they're similar to laminate or wood.
- Salvaged wood is a mixed bag, depending on the construction of the planks. Some are tongue and groove, and some are not. If you are unfamiliar with carpentry, you might want to consider professional installation.

Care and Maintenance

Each of the three materials has its own requirements, but the basics are the same. Keep it clean and follow the specifications of the manufacturer. Use only recommended cleaning products and clean up any spills immediately.

Renewable materials like cork, bamboo, and recycled wood not only beautify floors, but also help the planet.