

From: [BUILDER 2010](#) | Posted on: September 23, 2010 11:57:00 AM

## Product Pros and Cons: Hardwood Flooring vs. Bamboo

Should you stick with the old or go with the (relatively) new?

By: [Nigel F. Maynard](#)
[Related Articles](#) [Save / Share](#)  


Teragren says its Portfolio Collection of bamboo flooring is a wide-plank product that's an alternative to tropical hardwoods.

reach harvesting age.

When it comes to performance, bamboo is often compared to some of the hardest hardwoods, but it depends on the type of flooring, species, and quality of the manufacturing.

"Hardness is the main factor in durability," says [Teragren](#) in Bainbridge Island, Wash. "How hard is the bamboo? Bamboo flooring can be as soft as pine and harder than maple depending on the species of bamboo used and when it was harvested. Teragren specifies only Optimum 5.5 Moso bamboo harvested at maturity (five and a half to six years) when fiber density peaks. As a result, Teragren bamboo averages 25 percent harder than red oak and 12 percent harder than North American maple."

Mark D. Elwell, owner and operator of [Bamboo Flooring Hawaii](#) in Honolulu, says there are over 1,000 types of bamboo species, but Moso bamboo is a good one to look out for. "There are some stores selling very cheap, immature bamboo flooring that is coated with only a few coats of finish that are unfortunately giving bamboo flooring a bad name," he says. "We tell people you get what you pay for, and make sure you are comparing apples to apples when you are buying your flooring. Be educated, and ask about the bamboo maturity, finishes, and warranties."

Moso bamboo is indeed good indicator of quality. "Moso bamboo is the most valuable bamboo in Asia, especially China," says [Master Garden Products](#). "It is one of the most highly used plants for economic activities ... Moso bamboo's strength, flexibility, and ready availability have made it a dominant structural material throughout much

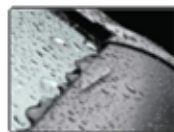
Wood is among one of the most loved flooring material in the home building and buying universe. Prized for its exceptional good looks and warmth, wood is highly versatile and sustainable. In the past 10 years, however, there has been a great disturbance in the force, and now wood has an able and extremely popular challenger: bamboo.

Though bamboo has had a limited history in the U.S. construction market, it has been widely used in East Asia and the South Pacific. One of the oldest building materials known to man, it has been used to build fences, houses, and furniture, and has even been known to hold up suspension bridges.

Bamboo is very much like wood, but it's not wood. Technically speaking, it's a tree-like grass that grows extremely fast, making it among the fastest-growing plants in the world. This rapid growth has made it one of the darlings of the green building world.

"Bamboo has the potential for rapid growth," says [The University of Tennessee College of Agricultural and Natural Resources](#) in Knoxville, Tenn. "Shoots have been observed to grow over 3 feet in a single day." In fact, [The Bamboo Site](#) says the plant grows so fast that it matures to reach market in about four years. With the exception of quick-yield trees, hardwood species take about 60 or 70 years to

### SPONSOR VIDEO



#### VELUX NO LEAK SKYLIGHT

With three layers of protection, VELUX has perfected the No Leak Skylight. We promise it won't

leak no matter what the weather. What's more, we back that assurance with an outstanding 10-year installation warranty. Watch this video to learn more.

### PROPANE VIRTUAL HOME



#### Tour the Virtual Propane Home

To learn how propane can deliver all of the amenities and performance today's homeowners

demand, go to [buildwithpropane.com/virtualhome](#)

## PRODUCT PROS AND CONS



### Product Pros and Cons: Asphalt Roofing vs. Metal

Asphalt dominates, but which material is right for your homes?



### Product Pros and Cons: Oriented Strand Board vs. Plywood

Which panel is right for your homes?



### Product Pros and Cons: Tankless Water Heaters vs. Conventional Storage Tanks

How to determine which system is right for your homes?

Bamboo comes in two types: strand and vertical. Most people in the industry say the strand stuff is much stronger than traditional bamboo flooring. "On a hardness scale a good quality bamboo in either the horizontal or vertical cut is around 1,450 p.s.i. on a [Janka Hardness Scale](#)," Elwell says. "The stranded bamboo is compressed and bonded with resins so is over 3,000 p.s.i. We sell the strand bamboo frequently for high traffic situations such as retail stores, restaurants, galleries, etc."

But bamboo also has drawn attention for its looks, though for a time only natural and caramelized tones were available. Today, manufacturers offer a staggering array of flooring choices with a multitude of stained options and textures including handscraped products that look like wood.

Wood, of course, has nothing to prove. Bamboo has assumed a high profile in home building, but wood's accomplishments are legendary and well-documented. Bamboo is new to U.S. builders and consumers, but wood is very familiar to everyone. It's just as beautiful and durable as bamboo, and just as versatile and green, The University of Kentucky says.

"It is the rapid growth and natural regeneration properties of bamboo that are primarily responsible for the 'green' reputation for bamboo," the university says. "However, many of the environmental benefits of bamboo are shared by wood. Natural regeneration is not limited to bamboo stands; it is a viable and widely used practice in tree forestry also. The longer rotation times for trees compared to bamboo can actually be considered to be an advantage for wood. Some tree species produce as much biomass per year as bamboo, but trees store this production for longer (in the living tree) so fewer harvesting resources (fuel, machinery, labor, etc.) are required for each ton of crop collected."

[Save / Share](#)  