



January 23, 2007

Ask a Natural Living Expert:
healthy home/
with Cheryl Terrace, Vital Design Ltd.

Flooring Choices

Hi Cheryl,

I have some environmental sensitivities and am wondering what flooring you can recommend that's good for me AND good for the earth? Thank you! posted by *phoenixrising*

Dear *phoenixrising*,

For those with environmental sensitivities or allergies, keeping the floor dust free is essential because it is the place where dust tends to accumulate most. Smooth floor coverings have the lowest concentrations of dust. This is the primary reason the medical profession often recommends linoleum coverings, which can be kept dust-free more quickly and easily, preventing household mites from multiplying. But I doubt you want your place to look like a hospital! Luckily there are so many eco-options for flooring, including rugs!

An overlooked and all too easy thing to do is remove your shoes when entering your (or anyone's) home. It keeps all the nasty things out of your haven and you can literally connect to your space. It is also really good for your feet: as anyone who has a regular yoga practice knows the benefits of healthy feet—'spread your toes!'

As a designer, I believe the type of room dictates the type of flooring choice. For a kitchen I like the look and feel of linoleum, not vinyl. Vinyl is unhealthy and can 'off-gas' for long periods of time. Linoleum is made using linseed oil, tree rosin, chalk and other natural materials. It is naturally anti-static and has healthy bactericidal properties. **Marmoleum** is good-looking, easy to maintain and gives a feel-good warmth to your bare feet. Another great option is cork, which also has a tactile quality to it and is extremely good-looking. **Habitus** is a store in NYC that offers cork flooring made from wine stopper waste.

Bathrooms are the perfect place for tile. Glass is impervious to moisture, making it a great choice for baths and showers. Go with beautiful recycled options of course—see the side column for sources.

And for main areas of your home, bedroom included, there is nothing like hardwood. Bamboo, which is really a grass, is very trendy right now. **Teragren Fine Bamboo Flooring, Panels & Veneer** has beautiful, durable bamboo flooring—see their Synergy Chestnut flooring in the photo above.

I also believe that responsibly harvested hardwood is much more beautiful and timeless. The **Forest Stewardship Council** is an international network to promote responsible management of the world's forests. Also check for **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified** flooring, which means it leads the pack from health and eco-perspectives. **Tried and True Wood Finishes** will keep your floor gorgeous in a healthy way.

Often people cannot live without something soft underfoot, especially in colder climates. I personally like the look and feel of **Tibetan rugs**, made from wool that has not been treated with any chemicals. Certain wool has a higher content of lanolin (higher altitudes), which makes it naturally more soil and moisture resistant.

Flor is a recycled modular carpeting company that has a wide variety of colors and patterns. It costs more than regular carpet, but the fact that you can keep it longer by just replacing sections makes it cost neutral. The company will even take it back for recycling.

Earth911 is a recycling website that will help find facilities that'll recycle linoleum and carpet in your area.

happy, healthy home! -C
january 23rd, 2007

