

Ask a Green Builder: How green is bamboo flooring?

Question: I am interested in taking the carpeting off the floors in my condo (I think there is plywood underneath), and putting in bamboo flooring. Is this something a do-it-yourselfer like me could do? Also, I heard that some bamboo is not really "green" and comes from countries where ecological damage is done to harvest it. How do you know if you're getting a green product? Thank you in advance.

Answer: From Dennis Allen at Allen Associates in Santa Barbara:

Jennifer, congratulations on getting rid of your carpet. That's a big green step towards improving the indoor air quality of your home.

In answer to your first question, if you are handy and have the proper tools, you can certainly install a new bamboo floor. Pre finished bamboo flooring would be easier for a DIY installer than site-finished types. An existing plywood subfloor will make your job easier, since the chances are that the floor is already level and the plywood gives you something to nail your new floor into. However, if you have any concerns about whether the floor is level or the room is square, or if you find that you have a concrete subfloor rather than plywood, I suggest that you rely on an experienced installer to do the work. The odds are that you will be more satisfied with the end result.

[Read the rest of the answer](#)
[See more green remodeling](#)
[See more Q&A](#)

Now for your second question, how do you know if you are purchasing a "green" bamboo floor product? One of bamboo's greatest benefits is that it is a very fast-growing plant. Its two- to six-year harvest cycle makes it a rapidly renewable resource, especially when compared to the majority of other wood floor products — oak, pine, maple, etc. — that take decades, even up to a century, to grow. Bamboo is the same as a grass in that you cut it and it re-grows from the same root stock. Be sure and get mature bamboo — grown for five to six years — as it is denser and much harder than floors made from material grown two to three years. The mature material is extremely durable (a 30- to 50-year lifetime) and is harder than a red oak or maple floor.

However, because the majority of bamboo comes from Southeast Asia, it has significant embodied energy stemming from the associated transportation impacts. And, you raised the point regarding potential ecological damage from the type of practices used to harvest the product.

Other important things to consider when purchasing new bamboo flooring are: Has the product has been thoroughly kiln dried to avoid warping over time? What is the formaldehyde content? Has it been made with environmentally and health-friendly adhesive materials?

To determine the "greenness" of a bamboo flooring product, ask your product manufacturer or supplier about these issues and look for the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) label, which will ensure that the product has been sustainably harvested.