

The Sensible Environmentalist

Wood vs. Bamboo Flooring

(NAPS)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**
Which is environmentally friendlier, wood or bamboo flooring?

I believe strongly in using renewable materials and energy where possible—and, from this



Dr. Moore

point of view, wood and bamboo are both good for the environment. Although bamboo has been getting a lot of positive attention, wood is actually the better choice.

A member of the grass family, bamboo is popular largely because of its short growing cycle: it renews itself in less than 10 years without the need for planting. There's no getting around the fact, however, that it grows in monoculture plantations, which provide few of the environmental benefits of a growing forest. Why cultivate vast areas of bamboo when even the most basic pine plantation has more biodiversity, provides habitat for more species of wildlife, contributes to soil and water quality and absorbs large amounts of carbon dioxide?

Most of the bamboo used for flooring is grown in China and manufactured in Vietnam. There's some concern over lax or non-existent environmental regulations in

these countries, as well as worker safety. In many cases, bamboo flooring is also made using formaldehyde-based glues, which release formaldehyde when exposed to heat and humidity.

Using wood, on the other hand, creates demand in the marketplace and gives countries around the world an incentive to plant more trees and maintain forested areas.

Wood products are recyclable, biodegradable and energy efficient—with many companies using wood waste to generate the energy. Yes, wood has a long growing cycle. That isn't a bad thing. We want forests at different stages of growth across the landscape. Some people place greater value on old forests because of their beauty. Beauty is subjective and, while old forests do indeed provide habitat for many species of wildlife, other species actually prefer newly regenerating stands.

As a sensible environmentalist, I believe that bamboo and wood flooring are both preferable to flooring made with non-renewable materials but that wood is the environmentally friendlier choice.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.