

## Nature's Favorite Floor

By Erica Thoits



*Above: Bamboo floors can be either 100-percent plied bamboo or engineered bamboo, where the plies are glued to a substraat for stability. "Wear-levels" can vary with the thicker the better.*

- 1. Bamboo flooring can be either plied vertically or horizontally. Like hardwoods they can also be stained a variety of shades, such as amber.*
- 2. Horizontal bamboo flooring stained amber.*
- 3. Bamboo flooring is just as beautiful when left in its natural state.*
- 4. The horizontal version of a natural color bamboo flooring.*

*Photos courtesy of EcoTimber*

From solar panels to low-energy fluorescent light bulbs, there are seemingly endless ways, small or large, to make your home more efficient and easier on the planet.

Whether you're concerned about saving on heating costs or trying to lessen your family's impact on the environment, being eco-conscious is a growing movement that makes sense for many households.

While bamboo has been an alternative to hardwood flooring for years, recently it's begun to emerge as a stylish, but green trend for the home. Technically a grass, this rapidly growing plant can reach up to 65 feet

in just four years. Where it takes decades to replace the mature trees that are cut down for hardwood floors, bamboo is practically never-ending in cultivated forests.

Part of what makes bamboo such a great renewable source is its incredible resilience. When you mow your lawn you aren't killing the grass — the same goes for harvesting bamboo. An extensive root system stays in place, allowing the bamboo to regenerate. Not only can bamboo be harvested without harming its surrounding environment, but it's an ideal plant for areas threatened by soil erosion.

Bamboo can grow in many regions of the world, especially in warm climates with frequent monsoons. Many parts of Asia, India, the Philippines, Japan and others are exporting more and more bamboo as demand grows.

Though bamboo is certainly easily available, says Meredith Gonzales, owner of Concord's green home supply store Your Home Your World, making sure you purchase quality bamboo from a reputable company is critical to ensure your floor lasts.

After moving to New Hampshire in late 2003 and beginning renovations on her house, Gonzales began to think of opening a store that would make it both easy and affordable for homeowners to go a little greener. Your Home Your World, which offers everything from organic mattresses to bamboo and cork flooring, opened in 2006.

After extensive research, Gonzales chose EcoTimber, a California based company, to supply her bamboo flooring. EcoTimber, says Gonzales, only uses mature bamboo, meaning it's at least five or six years old, from cultivated forests.

Looking at length, she adds, is another easy way to tell its quality. While many manufacturers sell bamboo that starts at three feet, six feet is considered premium grade. The strongest planks come from the bottom of the plant — the shorter the length, the younger and lower quality the bamboo.



*Above: Bamboo flooring isn't a new discovery, but it is quickly becoming a trendy alternative in the home that's also easy on the environment. This rapidly regenerating plant can grow to around 65 feet in just four years, making it a renewable (and stylish) choice for your new floor.*

When using good quality bamboo, it is actually harder than both red oak and maple floors. Like wood, it can

be left in its beautiful natural state or stained in a wide range of colors, including ebony, chestnut, hickory, pecan and caramelized.

Jim Devine of Devine Flooring in Milford has completed a handful of bamboo floors and has yet to hear of any problems. While the most common floors are still the more expensive hardwoods, says Devine, bamboo is catching on.

Devine also stresses the importance of using only high-quality bamboo to avoid denting and other performance issues. Devine Flooring's bamboo and cork supplies come from Natural Cork, another company with a reputation of being careful to choose trustworthy bamboo sources.

Bamboo, adds Devine, is not only rapidly renewable, but nothing is wasted – once the base of the bamboo is used for floors, the rest is turned into products such as chopsticks, plywood, window shades, paper and even cloth.

"It's just amazing what you can do with bamboo," adds Gonzales. At Your Home Your World, she also has bamboo countertops for the kitchen and even bamboo towels.

Once you begin researching this versatile plant, adds Gonzales, "it really sells itself." NH

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### **Grow Bamboo in the Back Yard**



*Above: Photo courtesy of bamboos.com*

Add a bit of an Asian feel to your surroundings with a perennial bamboo plant. True, most grow best near the Equator, but *Fargesia murielae*, a bamboo from the Himalayas is a shade-loving plant and grows more vigorously than other *Fargesias*.

It is still slow-growing enough your back yard will not turn into a jungle in five years.

The culms become progressively more branched each year and, as a result, more pendulous — hence a fountain-like growth habit. Fine specimen plants or use them spaced 10 feet apart to make a non-spreading screen. Evergreen in Zone 5 and warmer. Available from [www.bamboos.com](http://www.bamboos.com). (\$55 gallon-size)

Height 12 feet, Diameter of branches .5 inch  
Hardy to -20F, Zones 5-8, Partial shade