

Green decorating

Give your house an eco-friendly makeover

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Green doesn't have to equal expensive.

Using environmentally friendly materials in a home's renovation doesn't just give you the same conservation high as using energy-efficient light bulbs or reusable grocery bags. Many of these eco-friendly materials are also wallet-friendly or will prove longer-lasting than cheaper non-green alternatives. Here are a few ways to add some green to your house without spending a lot of green.

- **Wall treatments:** A good coat of paint can make a world of difference to a room. But many conventional paints used in homes have a lot of chemical additives. Try using water- or milk-based paints. These dry faster and they won't have the same heavy metals and solvents other paints contain. Meredith Gonzales, owner of Your Home, Your World in Concord, carries the Safecoat brand of paints.

"Many paint products can include exempt VOCs [volatile organic compounds] ... The government only regulates VOCs that damage the ozone, not [those that damage] indoor air. Lots of companies use these exempt VOCs in their products," Gonzales said.

If you're feeling green all over and you want to give your walls an eclectic feel, try out the American Clay company. American Clay Earth Plasters come in three different finishes that can be applied for any wall texture you desire and they're available in a variety of colors. Let the plaster dry out and re-hydrate it later for touch-ups.

"[Earth Plaster] really is something the average home owner can work with.... I put it in my hallway in my home and I never picked up a trowel in my life ... it was a lot of fun to work with. Because it's clay it stays wet longer than gypsum plaster ... so you can continue working with it. One of the really wonderful things is you can save the waste and if you damage [your wall], you can patch it. With other plasters [damage remains on] your walls," Gonzales said. American Clay might add as many as 8 LEED credits to your home. For full details on American Clay Earth Plasters, visit www.AmericanClay.com.

- **Floors:** Many a house-flipper's first instinct is to tear up old carpets and lay down a brand-spanking new hardwood floor. But many hardwoods used in flooring aren't harvested in a way Mother Nature would approve of. Cork flooring, however, is sometimes made from the recycled refuse of the wine bottling industry and is a more sustainable resource, as it is harvested from trees that continue to live. Cork tree bark is the material for all manner of cork products and the trees can be harvested every nine years. When you use cork, the tree the material came from is still alive and well, soaking up carbon dioxide. Cork floors are easy to install (they snap together) and they don't require harsh adhesives, nails or a carpenter to get the job done. Cork flooring can account for as many as 6 credits per LEED category to your home.

Derek Dow of WE Cork, a cork flooring manufacturer in Exeter, explained that cork floors cost about as much as a traditional hardwood floor, but cork takes on different properties than hardwood.

"[Cork] is a wood floor, but it's extremely durable ... [Cork] will indent like hardwood when there is heavy furniture placed on it, but it has a memory and will spring back, unlike hardwood floors," Dow said. WE Cork makes two lines of cork flooring and recommends that the classic style, which requires adhesives, be left in the hands of a building professional. The "floating" option, however, is great for the handyman who knows his way around a set of tools.

"The glueless option can be used in basements, but it's not recommended for bathrooms ... mostly because you need to leave an expansion gap around the room's perimeters, which leaves room for water to get in," Dow said.

- **Textiles:** Curtains, carpets, upholstery — what's a home owner to do? With so many items in the home requiring fabric (and textiles aren't cheap) it's easy to go to a big box store and pick out the cheapest window treatments and carpeting available. There's a sustainable option for just about every textile product available on the market today, from organic hemp or cotton sheets and curtains to organic wool carpeting.

The carpeting industry is seeing a steady rise in the amount of all-natural options available to consumers. Biohaus is a carpet company that weaves carpets out of natural, dye-less wools. At Your Home, Your World in Concord, Nature's Carpet brand claims its carpets actually improve the home's indoor air quality and Earth Weave's brand products (available in area-rug sizes) are completely biodegradable.

- Windows: As far as your windows are concerned, there are Earth-friendly options available, but when searching for a window shade, consider a style much like what the folks at Earthshade offer. Their heavier shades and blinds are not only fashionable, they add an additional 4.5 R value to your windows. That means you lose less heat to the outdoors and save money on your energy bills. And they are made from natural fibers. If you ever have to dispose of them they'll biodegrade. Bamboo blinds are another Earth-friendly option for window treatments and are easy to find at area big box stores