

Making Ripples

Sustainable Flooring Ideas

by Amanda Bancroft

We want to be in good standing with Mother Nature when we install floors into our earthbag home. So we chose cork flooring – the same material used in making corks for wine bottles. Ironically, neither Ryan nor I drink alcohol, but we'll be walking on cork sometime soon! What made us choose cork instead of traditional options like carpeting?

This probably won't surprise you, but carpeting is not all that great for our health, let alone the environment. Here's some trivia from Green America:

- 1.8 million tons of rugs and carpets go to the landfill, and they last 20,000 years!
- During their first years of use, new carpets fill the indoor air with hundreds of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including carcinogens like formaldehyde and benzene.
- Indoor pollutant levels can be two to five times higher than they are outside, and carpeting can trap toxic lawn chemicals and allergens tracked in from outside.

Sustainable flooring options include polished concrete, Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood, strandwoven woods headed for the trash, reclaimed or recycled materials, bamboo, and cork. For me, it was a hard choice between bamboo and cork. Easy-to-clean bamboo flooring comes in a wide variety of options, and the bamboo is harvested once every five years.

Cork, on the other hand, had several advantages that attracted me. Fast-growing cork is harvested from trees without harming them. Cork flooring can be used anywhere in the house, even in the bathroom instead of tile. As an insulator, cork floors will help keep our heating bills low. Cork floors absorb sound, which is perfect since our earthbag home will be very open – like one large room with a sleeping loft. And because it's a soft material, it's great for bare feet, something I miss now that we live on polished concrete flooring in our apartment. It will be nice to get out of bed without reaching for my slippers first!

I can't quite decide among the many colors of cork that exist –Eros, or Summer Brown? – but we found an American Cork company selling options for lower than \$3 per square foot.

Looking for local examples of sustainable flooring? The Fayetteville Public Library is no stranger to green floors. They use cork flooring in various sections of the building, and tiled carpeting, which can be replaced by squares rather than tearing up the whole thing. If you're considering replacing your flooring, browse your available options to find something that meets the needs of your space, without jeopardizing your family's health or causing more harm to Mother Nature.

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org