

Don't be BAMBOOzed by the Hype

Not all “green products” are as environmentally-friendly as we are led to believe. Find out what you should know about the differences between northern hard maple and bamboo in flooring.



MAPLE

SUSTAINABLE

Forest Statistics of the United States show that the U.S. grows far more hardwoods than are harvested each year. There is 82% more hardwood growing today than in 1952. And, approximately 9.5 billion cubic feet of timber is added each year to the hardwood forest industry. Northern hard maple stands are seldom clear cut and also not tilled to remove undergrowth so erosion is seldom a concern.

ACCOUNTABLE

More than 200 million acres of forestland in the U.S. are certified as sustainable, attributable to forest certification programs, including The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) - an international organization which requires chain-of-custody documentation and product labeling.

RESPONSIBLE

Solid maple flooring does not require or incorporate the use of any resins, such as urea-formaldehyde. Nor are Northern hard maple stands enhanced by chemicals such as pesticides, weed killers and fertilizers. Remaining wood material, which cannot be manufactured into present products, are recycled and used in numerous manners after a chipping process. This includes use as fuel for boilers, which in turn heats the facilities as well as dry kilns.

EQUITABLE

More than one million Americans are employed in the forest products industry and owe their jobs to this one basic industry that converts harvested timber to finished products.



BAMBOO

Bamboo is often planted and grown at the expense of other diversified species, even to the extent of clear cutting rain forests to expand growing areas. It is common practice to cut down existing trees and replace them with bamboo.

The bamboo industry has nothing comparable to FSC Certification, ensuring that the forest has been harvested in a sustainable fashion. Bamboo is presented as being as hard as red oak; however the hardness depends directly on the maturity of the stalk. Hardness can vary substantially since there are no governing controls over harvesting practices of bamboo.

Processing of bamboo flooring is typically done in coal fired plants, which emit significant pollution. Manufacturers of bamboo flooring handle potentially toxic chemicals, including binders and finishes; produce a lot of solid waste; and run equipment that emits combustion gases. The manufacturers' responsibility in dealing with these potential environmental and health hazards is unclear. The fossil fuels required to move bamboo products halfway around the world constitute an environmental strike against the product, leaving a significant carbon footprint.

Nearly all bamboo flooring sold in North America is produced in the forests of the southern Chinese province of Hunan. These forests are owned by the government, and individuals or companies can obtain contracts to harvest from them with little control over environmental and worker safety issues. There is no Fair Trade Certification, ensuring that the workers have appropriate working conditions and wages.

Information excerpted from the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association website (www.maplefloor.org).



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