

Dreaming of a Green Kitchen

*Eco-friendly and recycled materials
are no kitchen scraps*

BY JOHN IMES

During the holidays, the kitchen is bustling with activities like cooking, eating and entertaining family and friends. Wouldn't it be nice to have a healthier, more comfortable kitchen this holiday season while saving money and enhancing the environment?

Fortunately, there are lots of ways to make "green sense" in the kitchen. Each decision you make can reduce energy and maintenance costs, improve indoor air quality, improve health, safety and comfort, and reduce environmental impacts.

Your kitchen will look great, work better and give you a sense of pride that your family will truly be at home for the holidays in a green kitchen.

Appliances, lighting and water use

The average kitchen uses as much as 40 percent of a home's total energy. By selecting energy-efficient appliances and lighting, you can save money on utility bills without sacrificing features, style or comfort.

- Look for the ENERGY STAR label when buying a new refrigerator,* dishwasher or other kitchen appliance. ENERGY STAR products meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the EPA and United States Department of Energy. Many appliances also carry yellow Energy Guide labels to help you



These recycled glass tiles are as durable and functional as they are beautiful. Find tiles made from post-consumer recycled glass, porcelain or other salvaged materials. Then install the tile with solvent-free mastic on a durable cement backer board and use grout sealers free of formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

select energy efficient products.

- Light fixtures are also increasingly carrying the ENERGY STAR label. Make sure the fixtures are sized properly and positioned to put light where you

need it. Adding high-performance windows and skylights can also give you lots of efficient, healthy, natural daylight!

- Good ventilation is also a key part of a healthy kitchen. The Wisconsin Energy Star Homes program has excellent standards for ventilation, combustion safety and indoor air quality. In the kitchen, make sure your ventilation equipment is sized properly and exhausts to the outside.

* Before recycling your old refrigerator, make sure the old refrigerant is removed. Every year, we can prevent over 4 million pounds of ozone-depleting CFCs from being released into the atmosphere by removing and recycling refrigerants.

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■ The kitchen is one of the home's largest water users. By selecting a water-efficient dishwasher and low-flow faucets, you can help to minimize your impact on Wisconsin's water resources. Consider composting instead of using the garbage disposal to not only save water, but produce valuable mulch for your garden.

Cabinetry and Countertops

Two of the biggest decisions in any kitchen are what to use for cabinets and countertops. Not only do you have to choose products that look good, you also have to choose products that are durable, functional and offer the features you need. You can also select products that can protect your health and the health of the environment.

To avoid the problems of chemical off-gassing from new cabinets or the refacing of old ones, look for these environmentally friendly alternatives:

- **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood and plywood:** The Forest Stewardship Council is a third-party certifier of forest products from responsibly managed forests.
- **Formaldehyde-free medium density fiberboard (MDF):** Formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, is often used to produce MDF, a material similar to plywood that can be used for cabinet frames and doors. Request products that are formaldehyde-free.
- **Wheatboard or other panels made from agricultural fibers:** Straw, wheat, soybeans and other agricultural products can be used to make materials similar to plywood for cabinet frames and doors.
- **Reclaimed wood:** Reclaimed woods such as Douglas fir can be reused to make cabinets that are not only resource efficient, but uniquely beautiful as well.

Finding an environmentally responsible countertop that's durable, easy to clean and good looking offers a multitude of options. What's important to you? Do you want the durability and ease of installation that tile offers or the benefits and good looks of concrete, natural or engineered stone, or solid surface materials? Butcher block, laminates and natural linoleum are also good options. The chart available at

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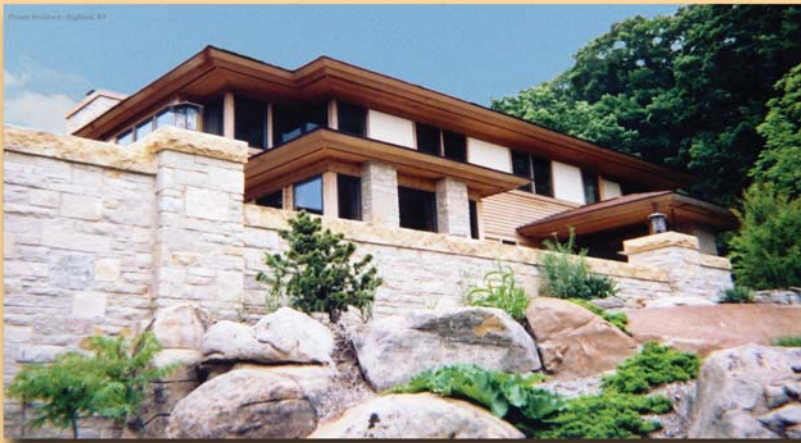


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Bamboo flooring



Fiber strand bamboo flooring



Cork flooring

www.seattle.gov/sustainablebuilding/greenhome.htm#Kitchen outlines the costs, benefits, opportunities and drawbacks of different countertop options.

What color is your floor?

Flooring is one of the most noticeable elements of any kitchen design and there are many different flooring options available. In terms of environmental benefit, there are several materials that stand out in terms of making green sense.

- **Natural linoleum:** Natural linoleum components are readily renewable. Vinyl, a common artificial alternative, is both produced and disposed of with environmentally-harmful results.
- **Bamboo:** Bamboo is readily renewable (canes can be harvested for use in flooring every three to 6 years) and is comparable in durability and hardness to wood flooring.
- **FSC-certified hardwood flooring:** This flooring has been harvested from forestry operations that are managed with long-term economic, environmental and social sustainability in mind.
- **Reclaimed wood:** Some of the “waste” going to landfills is still quite serviceable, and in the case of salvaged wood flooring, can add unique character and beauty to your home.
- **Cork:** Cork is harvested from the bark of trees — the trees themselves live for many years — making cork a readily renewable material.
- **Recycled glass tile:** These tiles are made with glass salvaged from a variety of sources — broken glass from window manufacturers, crushed car and airplane windshields and glass bottles.

What kind of flooring material is the best for me?

The best flooring material for your project is one that fits your budget and your aesthetics and meets your needs. Flooring materials can range widely in price and complexity of installation. Likewise, you may appreciate the quality and feel of a wool carpet, but carpeting may not be best surface for a kitchen floor.

We have compiled some basic information about different green

flooring materials on the Green Built Home Web site to help you decide which flooring material is the best for your project and answers to commonly asked questions. For more information, see www.greenbuilthome.org/diy_weekend_floor.asp

Green-it-yourself resources for the kitchen

- *The Smart Kitchen* by David Goldbeck (Ceres Press, 1994)
- *The New Natural House Book* by David Pearson (Fireside Publishers, 1998), see kitchen section
- Use the Green Built Home™ program and online resources. The Green Built Home Checklist has over 220 ideas to save money, protect our natural resources and improve your family’s health, safety and comfort. A Green Remodeling Checklist will be available in early 2005. To learn more about Green Built Home visit www.greenbuilthome.org
- The Seattle Sustainable Building Program has excellent green kitchen remodeling resources available at www.seattle.gov/sustainablebuilding/greenhome.htm#Kitchen

Appliances, Energy Efficiency and Ventilation Resources

- The ENERGY STAR program at www.energystar.gov lists appliances that meet the ENERGY STAR criteria. Also click on Common Home Improvements for kitchen remodeling information.
- Wisconsin ENERGY STAR Homes program at www.wifocusonenergy.com
- Eco-Friendly Flooring, is a wholesale supplier and installation contractor for sustainable flooring products, 100 S. Baldwin St., Suite 110, 608-441-3265, www.ecofriendlyflooring.com
- The Habitat ReStore, Dane County’s used and surplus building materials center, 208 Cottage Grove Road, 608-661-2813, www.restoredane.org
- Safe Building Solutions at www.safebuildingsolutions.com. If you’re in the Milwaukee area, visit their showroom at W29 S4498 Hillside Road in Waukesha.
- Home Environment at www.home-environment.com offers earth-friendly products, including safer paints, stains, cleaning products and more. 216 N. Henry St., 608-251-4905. ■