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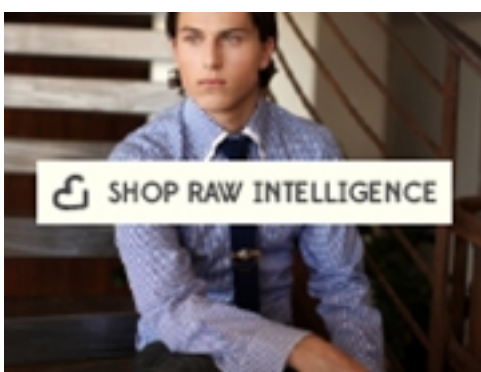
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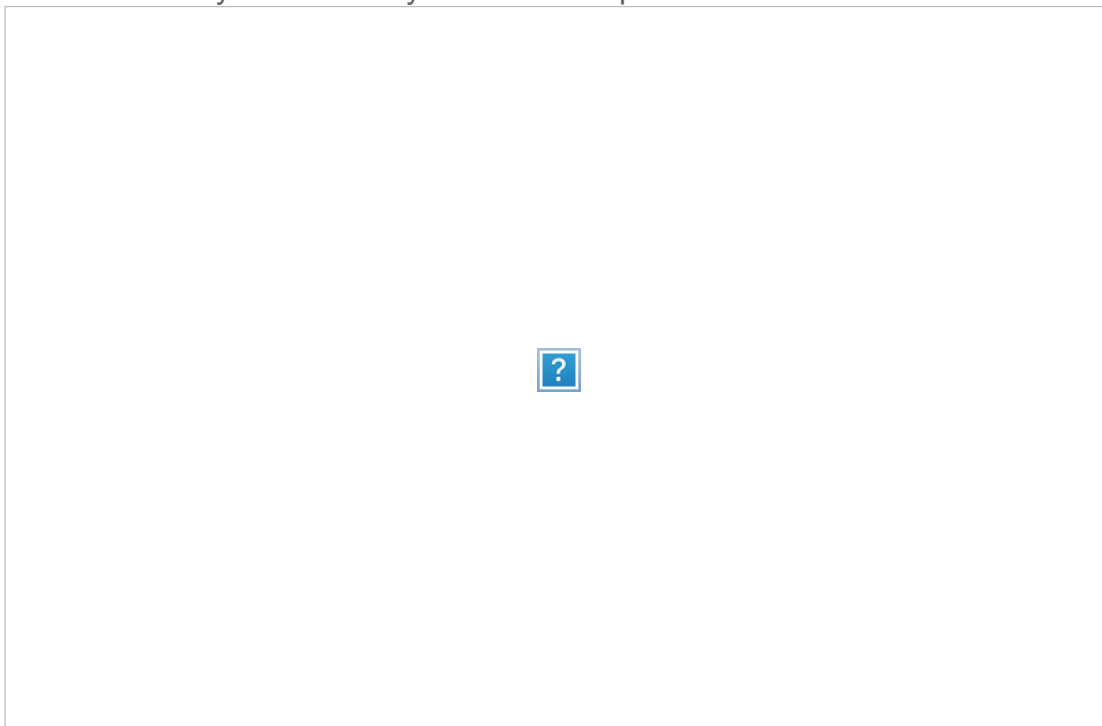
## Protect Forests with Sustainable Wood Floors

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Our homes – which are built primarily using wood construction – have a huge impact on our forests because of the amount of wood products they consume. This is especially true given the recent increase in the popularity of wood flooring in residential building and home improvement. Consumers are buying up unsustainable wood flooring at an alarming rate, which has a profoundly negative impact on our forests worldwide.

Deforestation is a serious environmental problem today and it has been so for the past century, resulting in a reduction in the size of [forests in the US](#) and abroad. This issue is a threat to the world's economies, climate change, biodiversity, and the millions of people who rely on forests for their livelihood.

Thankfully, there are plenty of sustainable wood floor alternatives that will allow you to enjoy the benefits of hard flooring without contributing to the [environmental consequences](#) associated with deforestation. The challenge is that there are lots of green marketing claims made by companies selling wood flooring, making it difficult for consumers to know what is truly green and what is greenwash. Protecting forests is a particular passion for us at Hearts, so we've put together this guide to buying eco wood flooring to make it easier for you to shrink your forest footprint.



## Quick Guide: Hardwood Floors and the Environment

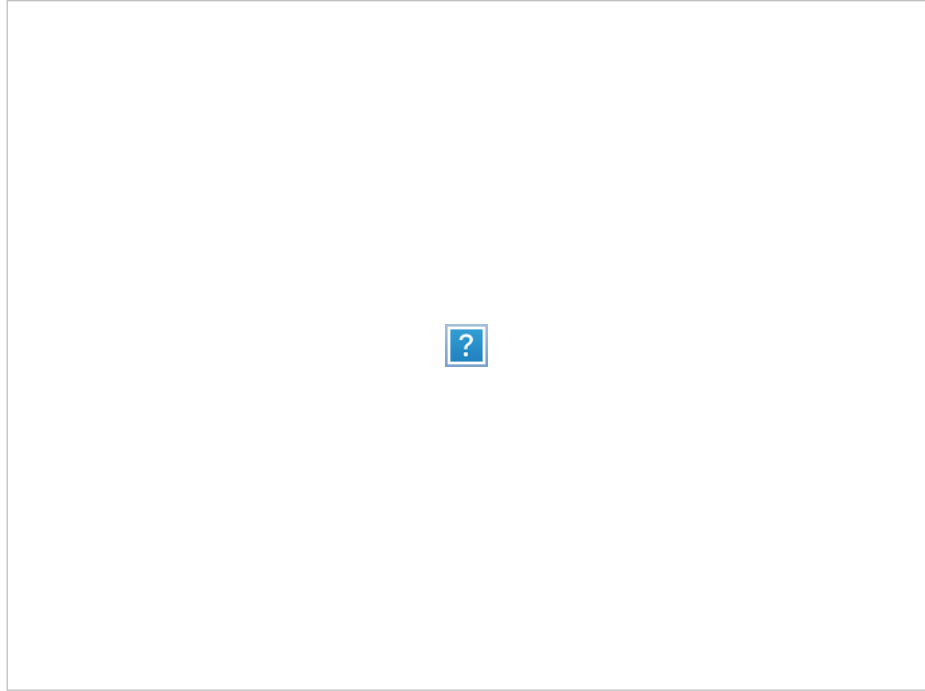
- **Forest areas in the world and the US:** There are at least 4 billion hectares of forest area in the world. The United States has the fourth largest forest area in the world with 304 million hectares or 7% of all global forest space.<sup>[i]</sup>
- **Rate of US deforestation:** Though the rate of deforestation on a global level has gone down from 16 million hectares per year in the 1990s to 13 million hectares per year in previous decades,<sup>[ii]</sup> the US still has the seventh largest loss of forest area. Every year between 2002 and 2005, we lost 831 square miles of old growth forest.<sup>[iii]</sup> If deforestation continues at the rate it is going today, we may completely lose all rainforests in the world within the next 100 years.<sup>[iv]</sup>
- **Cause of deforestation:** Illegal logging remains the biggest cause of deforestation worldwide.<sup>[v]</sup> Based on estimates by the World Bank, losses incurred due to illegal logging are equivalent to \$10 billion of natural resources per year.<sup>[vi]</sup>
- **Deforestation and biodiversity:** Aside from this, since forests provide homes for more than 90% of all land-dwelling plants and animals, deforestation also has a profound impact of biodiversity.<sup>[vii]</sup>
- **Climate change and deforestation:** Deforestation is one of the leading sources of greenhouse gas emissions; stopping deforestation has therefore been identified as a primary method for mitigating climate change.<sup>[viii]</sup>
- **Hardwood floors and deforestation:** Hardwood floor sales are estimated to be at \$150 million per month in the US.<sup>[ix]</sup> In all, approximately 2.8 million metric tons of wood are used in residential construction monthly.<sup>[x]</sup>
- **Average life of wooden floors:** Natural wood floor can last for more than 100 years or as long as the lifetime of the house it was installed in, provided it is properly cared for.<sup>[xi]</sup> Many consumers, however, remove their wood floors before the wood has been worn down, which represents a tragic waste of natural resources.
- **Wood waste entering landfills per month:** The entire process of manufacturing, using, and disposing solid wood generates about five million metric tons of wood waste per month. Out of this, 11% or 308,000 metric tons is wood waste that comes from construction of new homes.<sup>[xii]</sup>

## Take Action! Choose Sustainable Wood Floors

1. **Choose reclaimed, upcycled wood flooring:** Since wood can last for a lifetime with proper maintenance, sourcing upcycled wood flooring from old torn-down buildings, wooden pallets, construction sites, and even the landfill is probably the most sustainable way to install wood flooring in your home. Reclaimed wood not only will give your home that antique look, salvaged woods offer a unique history you can't get with new wood. Upcycling wood for your flooring reduces landfill waste, prevents deforestation, fights climate change, and much more. Finding this type of recycled building material can be challenging, but a good place to start is [Habitat for Humanity's ReStores](#) where they carry upcycled materials of all shapes and sizes. [Aged Woods](#) and [EcoTimber](#) are two other options – they carry FSC-certified 100% recycled wood.
2. **Purchase wood with a sustainable forest management certification:** There are several certification entities that ensure consumers can identify sustainably harvested wood floor products. The most well-known and reliable eco wood certification system is the [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) which involves regular third-party verification of forestry management practices used on a particular piece of property. Consumers can recognize sustainable wood flooring by the distinctive FSC logo.
3. **Consider cork or bamboo flooring:** Bamboo is a renewable material grass that grows extremely rapidly compared with trees and regenerates even after it has been harvested. Similarly, cork is a renewable material that is harvested from tree bark. It also regenerates more quickly than trees grow. Since these two materials mimic the performance of hardwood

floors but can grow more rapidly and renewably, they are much more sustainable conventional hardwood floors – and they're extremely beautiful as well. Just make sure that your bamboo flooring is FSC-certified as well to ensure that it has not been sealed with formaldehyde.

4. **Use nontoxic wood finishes:** If you really want sustainable flooring, be sure to use wood finishes that are low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Plant-based finishes are the most renewable and biodegradable and usually offer much lower VOC levels. Good options include Real Milk Paint's [Tung Oil Wood Finishes](#) or unearthed's [Hard Wax Oil](#) made with carnauba wax and linseed oil.



## Dig Deeper: Bamboo Flooring and other Sustainable Alternatives

- Find out more about the problem of deforestation via the [World Wildlife Fund](#).
- Discover how massive the construction and demolition debris problem is in the US through the US EPA's [solid waste management site](#).
- To learn more about FSC certification, visit the [Forest Stewardship Council's](#) website.

Images By [crustmania](#) and [Mongabay](#).

### + References

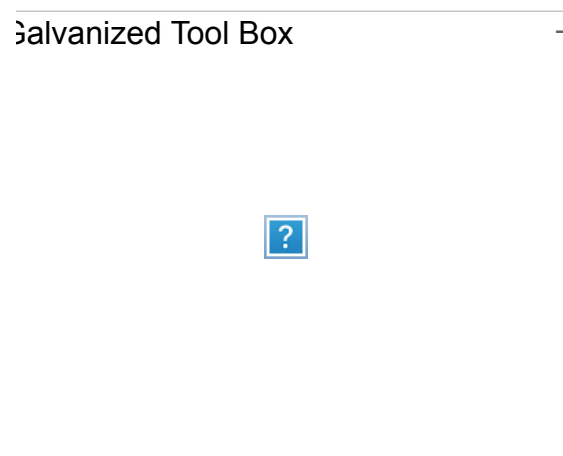
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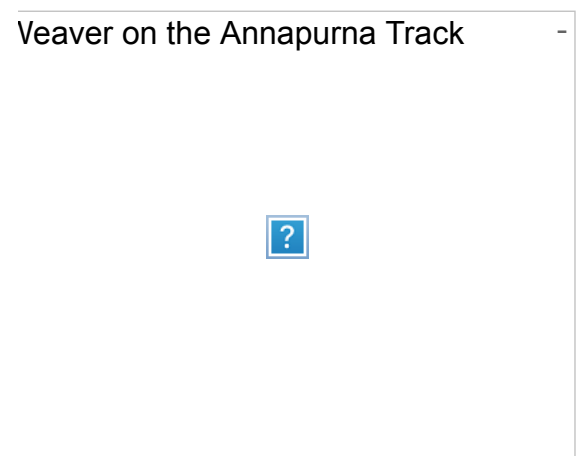
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