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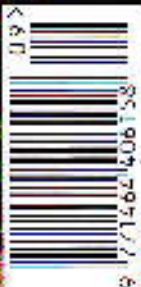
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YOUR GUIDE TO NATURAL

Hardwearing, eco-friendly and beautiful, and it's the real thing. Choose the style that's right for your rooms, with this expert guide

FEATURE SARAH WARWICK

When you're shopping for flooring, the term 'natural' indicates that the floor covering is made from plant fibres rather than that other traditional natural material – wool for carpet. Most natural floorings are made from just one plant fibre, but occasionally two or more are combined. For example, coir plus a sisal or seagrass went to add texture. Some natural flooring companies also offer designs that team a plant fibre with wool for a material with the best characteristics of both.

Each natural plant fibre has different qualities and these can make them more or less suitable for individual rooms. As a general rule, however, none of them is recommended for a humid room such as your kitchen or bathroom, as they will react to the moisture.

Take care also with choices for staircases. Sea and mountain grass can be slippery, so obviously they aren't recommended, while jute isn't suitable in the heavy traffic areas as it's not as hardwearing as other options.

As you'd expect, natural floor covering is ideal if you want a natural, neutral colour. If you go with sisal, though, you have a choice of single solid colours or colour combinations, as well as a wide range of neutral tones. Alternatively, if you're after a natural, busy-three-colour, some seagrass products have a gentle hint of green to them.

There's also a wide choice of finishes. Look for talored herringbone, chevron-styled bouclés, basket weaves and what are known as penines. You'll be able to create an effect that is as formal or relaxed as you want in your room.

These floorings are a green option in that they are made from natural fibres, rather than man-made. But look at your flooring's backing, too, if you are trying to maximise your eco-friendliness. Check that it, too, is a natural product.

VERSATILE SISAL

Qualities: Hardwearing. Costs start from around £26 per m².

Colours: Natural, neutrals, solid colours and colour combinations in weaves.

Best for... Living rooms; bedrooms; staircases; hallways.

Areas to avoid: Humid rooms.



Sisal Linen in Light Honey, £48.50 per m², Cuckoo, India



Sisal Panama in Blue Silver, £37.00 per m², Alternative Flooring

Sisal Flatweave
Roses in Raspberry
around £27.50 per m²,
Woodward, Gloucester



EXPERT TIP
All natural floor coverings should be fitted by a specialist. This is because each fibre has unique characteristics. It's advisable that the rolls are left in your room for 48 hours before fitting, so that the material can acclimatise to the surroundings – your supplier should advise you on your choice of flooring.

FLOORING

HARDWEARING SEAGRASS

Seagrass
Basketweave,
£27.90 per m²
Kirstin Cobb

Qualities: Durable and with some natural stain resistance. Expect to pay from around £17 per m².

Colours: Natural, can have a slightly greenish, yellow or buff tone.

Best for... Living rooms; bedrooms.

Areas to avoid: Staircases (as it may be slippery); bathrooms.



Seagrass Panama with colorful wot, around £18 per m², Woodward Greenart



Seagrass Fine in Origine Naturel, £20.76 per m², Global Trading



PRACTICAL MOUNTAIN GRASS

Qualities: Durable and with some natural stain resistance. Costs from around £22 per m².

Colours: Natural shades – darker than seagrass.

Best for... Living rooms; bedrooms.

Areas to avoid: Staircases (as it may be slippery); bathrooms.



Mountain Grass Herringbone, £23.15 per m²; bordered with Tweed in black, £17.50 per linear m; all Alternative Flooring



Mountain Grass Panama, £21.90 per m², Karim Carp



Mountain Grass Basketweave, £23.16 per m², Alternative Flooring

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

COIR comes from coconut husks, often from the southern tip of India. The outer fibres are removed and soaked for up to a year before they are dried and spun into yarn.

JUTE is the inner bark of the Asian corchorus plant. The fibres are softened in water, dried and then combed, twisted and spun into yarn.

MOUNTAIN GRASS comes from China and Vietnam, and grows in the mountainous areas. It's harvested, dried and hand-spun into cords before being woven into materials for flooring.

SEAGRASS is found in the low-lying coastal meadows in the same regions. It's harvested and dried before being spun into yarn.

SISAL comes from the agave sisalana plant, grown in Mexico, Brazil, East Africa and China. It's spun into yarn and then woven. ▶