

Flooring

Our latest tests yield 13 top values

SOLID OAK is still America's favorite flooring for style, and vinyl wins if you're on a budget. But lower prices and improved performance for bamboo make it a top pick when it comes to toughness.

In our tests of almost 50 floorings, EcoTimber's Woven Honey bamboo beat a bevy of hardwoods with its impressive resistance to wear and dents. Yet at \$5.50 per square foot, it costs more than one-third less than some solid-oak floorings.

Bamboo is more renewable than trees because that fast-growing grass can be harvested in as little as four years. The EcoTimber and last year's top-scoring Teragren are part of an industry move to strand bamboo, which is shredded into fibers to make it harder than the usual strips. Lower-emissions adhesives are another benefit.

You'll pay even less for the best plastic-laminate flooring and get the look of wood or stone and "floating" installation without nails or glue. But our tests, which include months of simulated foot traffic, spills, and other abuse, show that big names don't always deliver durability.

Pergo is the biggest name in plastic-laminate flooring, which typically uses a clear wear layer over a photo of wood or stone. But in our abrasion tests, two Pergo products showed wear far sooner than the top-scoring Armstrong. Long wear is especially critical for laminate flooring because it can't be refinished.

And though vinyl is the only waterproof alternative to tile for baths, performance varied even from lines within the same brand. Congoleum is a best-selling vinyl brand. Its premium DuraCeramic Sierra Slate did best in our tests. But its entry-level Pacesetter scored last among vinyl and among the lowest overall.

How to choose

See the box below for pros, cons, and prices for each of the six major flooring types. Then see our recommendations for top picks. Here are other shopping tips:

Gauge the traffic. The best vinyl flooring for kitchens is also best for baths because moisture and spills won't damage it. The two Lumber Liquidators solid floorings we tested and the three lowest-

6 top-selling floorings: What you get, what you pay

1. SOLID WOOD/BAMBOO

Best for natural warmth in a kitchen; can be sanded and refinished several times.

But poor choice for baths and other damp places. Wood can discolor and wear quickly and tends to dent. Hard to install.

Price \$7 to \$12 per sq. ft.

4. VINYL

Best for baths and budget kitchens. Easy installation. Resists wear, moisture, stains, and sun damage. Some looks more like stone.

But even the best still looks like vinyl up close.

Price \$3 to \$7 per sq. ft.

Note: Prices include installation.

2. ENGINEERED WOOD

Best for easy installation. Veneer over substrate; most can be nailed, stapled, glued, or floated. May be refinished.

But poor choice for baths; can be damaged by spills. Wears quickly and dents easily.

Price \$5 to \$10 per sq. ft.

5. LINOLEUM

Best for those who want a natural, resilient material. Fine for baths; tends to resist moisture, dents, and sunlight.

But wear and scratch resistance varied. Vinyl still offers more choices for less.

Price \$4 to \$9 per sq. ft.

3. PLASTIC LAMINATE

Best for toughness, choice, easy installation; can be floated. The best have better finish wear than some wood.

But poor choice for baths; can be damaged by big spills. Can't be refinished.

Price \$4 to \$8 per sq. ft.

6. CERAMIC TILE

Best for baths or kitchens with a bigger budget. Tends to resist wear, most damage.

But hard surface can break dropped items. Difficult to install. Tile can crack, and grout can stain.

Price \$8 to \$15 per sq. ft.

scoring engineered-wood floorings swelled from heavy spills.

Consider doing it yourself. Homeowners install roughly half of all flooring. Floated floors are easiest. For vinyl, planks or tiles are easier to install than sheets.

Think safety. Almost all flooring scored good or better for wet and dry slip resistance. The Montado and Wicanders plastic laminates and two top Congoleum vinyls did especially well; the Anderson Pacific Cumberland Oak solid wood scored fair.

Be sure it's really green. Wood flooring certified by the Forest Stewardship Council and Sustainable Forestry Initiative offers some assurance that it's from sustainably managed forests. But other flooring might have green attributes without those credentials. Vinyl flooring certified by the industry FloorScore program meets California standards, the nation's toughest, for volatile organic compounds, which are linked to health problems and pollution. Our picks are on that list. But vinyl floors still bring other concerns, such as phthalate exposure, along with manufacturing and disposal hazards.

CAN THIS WOOD FLOOR BE SAVED?

Damaged vinyl floors are relatively easy to replace, but you'll probably repair solid wood. We asked Sprigg Lynn, owner of Universal Floors in Washington, D.C., about the most common wood-floor problems. Price ranges are based on floors up to 200 square feet:

- Problem** Worn finish.
- Repair** Buffing or light sanding, plus finish.
- DIY cost** \$20 to \$50 per gallon for finish (about a gallon for 200 square feet), \$10 to \$20 for other materials plus sander rental.
- Pro repair** \$300 to \$800 plus \$10 to \$20 per new board if needed.

- Problem** Boards are cracked, cupped, or crowned from humidity extremes.
- Repair** Sand or replace boards that still look damaged once humidity is at normal level.
- DIY cost** Same as for worn finish.
- Pro repair** \$500 to \$1,000 plus \$10 to \$20 per new board if needed.

- Problem** Water damage from flooding or a major kitchen spill.
- Repair** Sand and refinish if damage is minor; replace boards if major.
- DIY cost** Same as for worn finish for minor damage, but get a pro inspection.
- Pro repair** \$1,700 to \$2,200 for labor and materials to rip out and replace the damaged flooring after major water damage.

Ratings Flooring

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)



Recommendation	Rank	Product	Price per sq. ft.	Sq. ft. per box	Overall score	Test results						
						Wear	Scratches	Dents	Stains	Sunlight (UV)		
		All engineered wood, plastic laminate, and bamboo products can be floated unless otherwise indicated.										
					0					100		
					P	F	I	G	I	V	G	E

A PREFINISHED SOLID WOOD Usually nailed to a subfloor at grade or above; usually 3/4-inch thick.

✓	1	EcoTimber Woven Honey ¹	\$5.50	23	69	+	+	+	+	○
✓	2	Teragren Synergy Wheat TPF-SWN-WHT (strand) ¹	8.50	22	64	○	+	○	+	○
✓	3	Bruce Dundee Plank Natural CB1210	5.70	22	58	+	○	+	+	+
	4	EcoTimber Solid Bamboo Horizontal Amber BSPHAF6 ¹	5.50	27	55	○	+	+	+	○
	5	Lumber Liquidators Bellwood Natural Red Oak HUSRO3N38V	4.70	40	54	+	+	+	+	○
	6	Mirage Classic Brazilian Cherry (Jatoba) I2264	8.00	20	52	+	+	+	+	+
	7	Lauzon Classics Northern Red Oak Natural R0030225	9.00	20	51	○	○	+	+	○
	8	Teragren Signature Naturals Flat Natural PF-FGN-MPL ¹	9.00	17	51	+	+	+	+	+
	9	Lumber Liquidators Morning Star Strand Natural PRBAMSTN ¹	4.00	18	47	+	+	+	+	+
	10	Anderson Pacific Cumberland Oak PACCW0314 Canebrake	8.00	20	42	+	+	+	+	+

B ENGINEERED WOOD Can usually be nailed or stapled anywhere in the house.

✓	1	Armstrong Locking Hardwood Bamboo Carbonized Natural EL5BBCCNLG ¹	7.50	18	59	○	+	+	+	+
✓	2	Shaw Epic Hardwood Symphonic SW119-774 Red Oak Natural ²	5.00	20	56	+	+	+	+	○
✓	3	Mannington American Classics Collection Oak Plank	7.25	26	54	+	+	+	+	+
	4	Mohawk Artiquity Santa Barbara Plank WSK1[-03] Harvest Oak ²	9.00	20	51	+	○	+	+	+
✓	5	BR-111 Brazilian Cherry PFENGBC3 ²	5.70	33	49	+	+	+	○	+
	6	Bruce Turlington Lock-n-Fold 3" Maple Natural EMA00LG	4.40	33	48	+	+	+	+	+
	7	Mannington Exotics Collection Horizontal Bamboo BHO3NA1 Natural ¹	7.00	19	48	+	+	+	+	+
	8	Harris Wood Traditions Solid Red Oak Natural HS70200K33 ²	4.50	20	48	+	+	+	+	○
	9	Lauzon NextStep Northern Red Oak Natural R003B225 ²	8.50	32	45	+	○	+	+	+
	10	Bruce Turlington 3" Oak Plank Bitterscotch E536	3.50	30	44	+	+	+	+	○
	11	Armstrong Beckford 3" Oak Plank Harvest Oak BP421HOLG	3.50	30	44	○	+	+	○	+

C PLASTIC LAMINATE Can usually be floated anywhere in the house.

✓	1	Armstrong Nature's Gallery American Duet L6522-NS1 Natural Oak (narrow)	3.50	13	74	+	+	○	+	+
✓	2	Wilsonart Estate Plus Harvest Oak W3000113	5.50	20	72	○	+	+	+	+
	3	Montado Cork RK49001 Jisbula Cinnamon (Carpet One) ³	9.50	23	67	○	+	○	+	+
	4	Pergo Accolade Rustic Oak PJ2627	3.25	18	65	+	+	+	+	+
	5	Pergo American Cottage Natural Oak 80094 (Lowe's)	3.40	18	65	+	+	+	+	+
	6	Mannington Revolutions Plank Ontario Oak 26300 Natural	5.40	22	65	+	+	+	+	+

Ratings continued on next page

Ratings Flooring Continued

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B, etc.)

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Product	Price per sq. ft.	Sq. ft. per box	Overall score	Test results				
						Wear	Scratches	Dents	Stains	Sunlight (UV)
		All engineered-wood, plastic laminate, and linoleum products can be floated unless otherwise indicated.								
					0					100
					P F G V G E					

C PLASTIC LAMINATE continued

7	Wicanders Corkcomfort Floating HPS ³	\$7.00	23	65	○	●	○	●	●
8	Kronotex SwiftLock Dynamic Clic Brazilian Cherry D439 (Lowe's)	2.60	23	64	○	●	○	●	●
9	Kronotex SwiftLock Dynamic Merbau Brazil D1460 (Lowe's)	2.40	26	62	○	●	●	●	●
10	Pergo Presto Red Oak Blocked PH 4577 (Home Depot)	3.00	20	61	○	●	○	●	●
11	Quick-Step Uniclic Plank 8mm (Classic 800) U893U Natural Red Oak	2.50	17	61	○	●	○	●	●
12	DuPont Real Touch Elite Merbau FG8010 (Home Depot)	4.00	18	60	○	●	○	●	●

D VINYL Can usually be glued down anywhere in the house.

✓ 1	Congoleum DuraCeramic Sierra Slate SI-74 Golden Greige	4.00	17	89	●	●	○	●	●
✓ 2	Congoleum DuraStone HPF Hearthstone HT-43 Sandy Clay	5.20	18	85	●	○	○	●	●
✓ 3	Mannington Adura Vintage Oak Plank	4.80	16	80	●	○	○	●	●
✓ 4	Nafco Better Living Collection Perma-Stone Natural Slate NS-660 Sand Stone	5.00	27	78	●	○	○	●	●
5	Armstrong Destinations Padua Fieldstone 95017	3.50	4	69	●	●	○	●	●
6	Armstrong Natural Fusion Mediterranean Walnut X3002 Honey	4.50	4	67	○	●	○	●	●
7	Congoleum Ultima 5 Star Natural Plank ULO11 Natural	2.70	4	67	●	●	○	●	●
8	Nafco Best Living Collection Crestview Plank CP-37 Medium Oak	7.00	27	60	○	○	○	●	●
9	Mannington Naturals Grand Cayman	3.60	4	52	○	●	○	○	●
10	Armstrong Memories Oak River 62861 Natural Oak	2.25	4	51	○	●	○	○	●
11	Congoleum Pacesetter	2.00	4	49	○	●	●	○	●

E LINOLEUM Can usually be glued down or floated anywhere in the house.

1	Armstrong Marmorette Oak Brown 19066 ²	4.00	4	66	○	●	●	○	●
2	Marmoleum Click Sahara 53174	6.00	21	66	○	○	○	○	●
3	Nova Linoleum Klick 6615	7.00	18	54	○	○	○	○	●

¹ Bamboo product. ² Cannot be floated. ³ Cork product. ⁴ Not applicable; comes in sheets.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mainly on resistance to wear, scratches, dents, stains, sunlight, moisture, and slips. Moisture resistance, not shown, is based on damp sponge left overnight (minor spills) and soaked samples (long exposure). Slip resistance, not shown, is friction level using industry machine with leather and neolite. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. **Wear** denotes how quickly surface wear was noticeable after abrasion machine was used. **Scratches** is ability to withstand dragged-object simulation. **Dents** is resistance to blunt and pointed weights dropped from various heights. **Sunlight (UV)** is exposure to high levels of ultraviolet light for roughly two weeks. **Price per sq. ft.** is based mainly on price paid. **Sq. ft. per box** is as claimed.

Overview

Top performers did best in our everyday abuse tests. For baths, we suggest vinyl or ceramic tile for its moisture resistance.

✓ CR Best Buy

These models offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

✓ Recommended

These high-scoring models stand out from the crowd for the reasons below.

If you want solid wood or bamboo:

A1 EcoTimber \$5.50/sq. ft. **CR Best Buy**

A2 Teragren \$8.50/sq. ft.

A3 Bruce \$5.70/sq. ft.

Among bamboo, **A1** offers better dent resistance and costs less than **A2**. Choose **A3** if oak is worth less dent and UV resistance.

Real wood with easier installation:

B1 Armstrong \$7.50/sq. ft.

B2 Shaw \$5/sq. ft.

B3 Mannington \$7.25/sq. ft.

B5 BR-111 \$5.70/sq. ft.

These use a veneer of bamboo or wood over wood substrate. Choose **B1** if you want a top bamboo, though it must be floated. **B2** and **B3** are best among oak and can be nailed or glued; **B3** can also be floated or stapled. **B5** must be nailed; choose it if you value Brazilian cherry over stain resistance. Also consider **B6** if color change from sun isn't a concern.

For laminate's style and toughness:

C1 Armstrong \$3.50/sq. ft. **CR Best Buy**

C2 Wilsonart \$5.50/sq. ft.

Impressive wear resistance and a low price make **C1** a top value. Choose **C2** if you need superb dent resistance. Also consider **C3** and **C7** if you're willing to pay for real cork, rather than a photo, beneath the clear wear layer.

For baths or a kitchen on a budget:

D1 Congoleum \$4/sq. ft. **CR Best Buy**

D2 Congoleum \$5.20/sq. ft.

D3 Mannington \$4.80/sq. ft. **CR Best Buy**

D4 Nafco \$5/sq. ft.

All are tiles or planks, which are easier to install than sheet vinyl. Both Congoleums and Nafco mimic stone better than many; **D1** is tops for stains. Choose **D3** if you want a wood look. Also consider the sheet **D5** if you want your flooring without any seams.