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Go Green, Baby

Tips On How To Create A Planet-Friendly Nursery For Your Little One



Written by [Kelli Rosen](#)

Decorating a nursery can be a daunting task, even more so if you are expecting your first child, but trying to save the planet while you're at it could very well make an expectant mom's head spin. Fortunately, eco-friendly options are becoming increasingly available, and although they are yet to be considered mainstream, there are still many adorable – and chic – options from which to choose. "Five years ago, eco-friendly options for the nursery were virtually non-existent," says Brian Green, general manager at Great Beginnings in Gaithersburg, MD. "Today, however, these items are much more popular." Knowing what to look for before you go to the store will help you make wiser purchasing decisions, especially if you plan to go green.

When selecting items made of wood – cribs, changing tables, nightstands – look for solid ones made by companies that get their materials from sustainable forests, and avoid those constructed of particleboard, plywood, and MDF. "They often contain chemicals, such as formaldehyde, which can take a long time to off-gas," says Laura Forbes Carlin, who along with sister Alison Forbes, authored *The Peaceful Nursery* (Delta, 2006). (Off-gassing is when VOCs – volatile organic compounds – like formaldehyde are released into the environment and jeopardize air quality.) You can help the environment, too, by choosing convertible furniture pieces, such as cribs that turn into toddler beds, or changing tables that can be converted to dressers. Remember the longer you can use an item the longer it stays out of the landfill.

Teresa Chitikov of Lutherville, MD, was drawn to Bratt Decor, a favorite of Hollywood celeb-moms such as Sarah Jessica Parker, Courtney Cox, and Angelina Jolie, when it came time to outfit her son Alexander's nursery. "Initially I liked the way the furniture looked," she says, "but the selling point was actually when I found out how it was made."

Eco-friendly Options

Like many trend-setting baby-goods companies, Bratt Decor is mindful of the planet. "I am personally committed to the environment and we are taking our company more and more in that direction. It's the only responsible choice considering our clientele is the future," says Mary Bauer, president of the Maryland-based company with boutique stores in Baltimore and Falls Church, VA. "Our wood supply is forested from 1.7 million new trees specifically planted for harvest in the wood and paper industry ... and all of our paints and stains are non-toxic."

In addition to furniture, other considerations include flooring and paint. Carlin and Forbes suggest eschewing wall-to-wall carpeting, which is full of chemical-containing adhesives, stain repellents and

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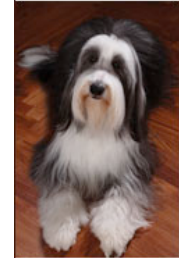
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flame retardants, in favor of hardwood floors. Be sure the planks are made of wood from sustainable forests and finished with a nontoxic sealer to reduce VOC emissions. As for paints, choose a line that offers a low- VOC version. "Paint in advance so the existing VOCs can off-gas before the baby is born," Carlin says.

If creating an entirely eco-friendly space for your bundle of joy is a bit overwhelming, consider taking baby steps at first. "Start with the mattress," Carlin suggests. "Babies spend a majority of their early lives asleep in their cribs so it's important that this environment is free of toxins."

Carlin and Forbes say conventional mattresses made of synthetic materials emit a plethora of toxic fumes. They suggest especially avoiding those treated with the flame retardant PBDE (polybrominated diphenyl ethers) and opting for ones that use organic cotton and wool, which is a natural flame retardant. At Great Beginnings, you'll find an organic crib mattress from Naturepedic, free of vinyl/PVC and polyurethane foam.

Being kind to the earth doesn't have to end with furniture purchases and decor options. Accessories, too, can be eco-friendly. Carlin and Forbes recommend buying bedding made from organically grown cotton, or if you purchase conventional linens, wash them several times prior to use in a nontoxic, biodegradable laundry soap.

Perhaps the most significant contribution you can make to the green movement is to recycle your purchases once your little ones have outgrown them. "Save your things and pass them along to your pregnant friends," Carlin says. "Recycling is a wonderful thing – just make sure that what you give away meets current safety standards."

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