

Making hay inside the house

Strawboard/agrifiber products blossoming on the homefront

There's more wheat in the bread drawer these days as the use of agrifiber products rises on the homefront. Once just the kernel of an idea, agricultural fiber-based products are now on their way to becoming staples for a wide range of interior uses.

Panels and boards made from wheat straw, sugar cane and other agricultural crops are appearing everywhere from a showcase straw house in Montreal to kitchen and bath cabinets and interior furnishings across North America. Engineered to meet or exceed performance standards of industrial-grade particleboard, these agrifiber products are now a viable option for a host of applications.

A custom-order manufacturer in Portland, Ore., for example, first introduced

wheatboard as a substrate in one kitchen cabinet collection over a year ago. Not only did the new agrifiber line garner an industry product innovation award, but the overall performance results were so successful that today the company uses wheatboard in all its kitchen and bath cabinets.

"Wheatboard is light, strong, and repels moisture well," explains Rick Fields, vice president and general manager, Neil Kelly Cabinets. "We couldn't find any reason not to use it."

A high-profile Canadian building also proves that agrifiber products are no straw in the wind, but an up-and-coming option. The first straw house in downtown Montreal features straw-

board throughout its 2,000-square-foot design. The ecological home, completed last summer as part of the Affordability and Choice Today Program for housing innovation, boasts strawboard on wall paneling, cabinets, baseboards and shelving.

Products made from annually renewable resources have been in the development stage for years. Researchers at Iowa State University, for example, have been working for nearly a decade to find ways to use agricultural materials like cornstarch to manufacture composite panels. Today, wheatboard and other agrifiber products have successfully entered the consumer market and are coming into their own. They are used increasingly in the manufacture of office and residential furniture, kitchen cabi-

nets, case goods and other applications. They are now also widely available at home supply stores like Lowes and Home Depot throughout the United States and Canada.

Consumers aren't likely to notice any visible difference with these crop-based boards, although they may pick up on the light weight of the products, which make them easy to work with. However, customers may well notice a difference in their pocket books, as cost benefits draw manufacturers to agrifiber products.

One ready-to-assemble (RTA) furniture manufacturer began using strawboard as a component for its home office and home entertainment designs two years ago because of its competitive

price. "This allows us to offer a cost-effective product to the customer," says Derek Okada, president, Talon Systems, Inc.

Strawboard performs as an equal with other tried-and-true composite boards, according to Okada. "We intermix straw fiber particleboard, medium density fiberboard and wood fiber particleboard," he notes.

Although their potential has only begun to be tapped, agrifiber products are already blossoming on the homefront, providing consumers greater options than ever before.

For more information about engineered wood products, contact the Composite Wood Council at 301-670-1782 or visit their Web site at www.pwmd.com.

Preventing damage to hardwood floors

(NAPSA) - The experts at Bruce hardwood floors recommend these hints to keep your hardwood floors looking great for the life of your home.

■ **Never clean a hardwood floor with water or cleaners mixed with water, such as oil soaps.** These cleaners may dull the finish and permanently damage the floor.

■ **Place doormats outside** to keep dirt and moisture from being tracked into the house. Inside, use area rugs to further prevent grit from being tracked onto your hardwood floor. To keep rugs from slipping, use an approved rubber rug mat from a reputable manu-

facturer. Don't use rubber, foam or plastic mats; they may discolor the floor.

■ **Normal exposure to sunlight** will bring about changes in the shading of any hardwood floor as it ages. Move area rugs occasionally to avoid the appearance of "discolored" patches.

■ **To prevent scratches, sweep or vacuum your floor often** to remove loose dirt or grit.

■ **Wipe up spills as soon as possible**, before they get sticky or dry. Remove dried spills with a cloth or scrub pad dampened with a no-wax floor cleaner for urethane floors or wax stripper for wax

floors.

■ **Use manufacturer recommended floor protectors** on the feet of furniture to avoid scratches. Barrel-type casters wheels or wide flat glides are best. Other types of casters may scratch or dent. Replace the casters on your furniture if necessary.

■ **Don't worry about sanding and refinishing** if you do get a minor scratch on the floor. In most cases, buffing your floor with a soft nylon pad will remove minor scratches and abrasions. If wear is more severe, the finish can usually be recoated without the sand-

and-finish mess.

DESIGN CALENDAR

Here come the brides

Haberman Fabrics in Royal Oak hosts "Royal Wedding Seminars" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 16, to benefit Gilad's Club Metro Detroit and Stinson House. Among the seminars: "Flowers," with Tim Hourigan of The Flower Co. in Royal Oak discussing how beautiful flowers can enhance the wedding day.

A minimum donation of \$10 in advance or \$15 at the door. Call (248) 541-0010 to register, pre-register online at www.habermanfabrics.com, visit the store, or mail donation to Haberman Fabrics, 117 West Fourth Street, Royal Oak, 48067.

Fresh flower workshop
Jacqui Carney of Paterson

Carney Florist will host a workshop in her shop from 2-3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 19 entitled "A Cake Stand Centerpiece." Participants will learn how to create a stunning floral centerpiece wreath with fragrant white wax flowers. The wreath encircles a flower filled votive candle.

Basic flower handling and processing techniques as well as several principles of floral design will be discussed in the workshop. The cost of the workshop is \$20 plus materials. Materials will range from \$25-\$35.

Paterson Carney Florist is located in downtown Birmingham at 239 Pierce Street. Pre-registration for this workshop is required. You can register at the shop or by calling (248) 647-7477.

Fluorescent bulbs offer benefits

By TIM SNYDER
TODAY'S HOMEOWNER MAGAZINE

Most folks know that fluorescent bulbs consume less energy than standard incandescent lightbulbs, but here's another reason to use them: They last a lot longer, which makes them ideal for hard-to-reach fixtures like those in your garage, stairwells, attic or anywhere else you need to use a ladder or chair when you replace a bulb. The new generation of compact fluorescent (CFL) are designed for screw-in lamps and fixtures, they don't flicker like their predecessors and, according to major manufacturers like Philips, GE and Sylvania, they last 6 to 7 years under normal use. That's eight to 10 times longer than incandescent.

The energy you'll save: If you replace a 60-watt incandescent bulb with a 15-watt CFL, you'll get almost the same amount of light output, and you could save around \$45 over the extended life of the CFL. Of course, there are a couple of disadvantages to consider. CFLs cost considerably more than incandescent lights.

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PLUMBING TIPS DO YOU RUN OUT OF HOT WATER?



JEFFREY MOSS

Are you always running out of hot water when you take a shower? Does your family have to wait until your water heater recovers to take another shower? Let me introduce you to the newest water heater on the market today. It is called the Takagi Instantaneous Water Heater. The Takagi Instantaneous water heater delivers nearly 7 gallons of hot water continuously, enough to shower and still fill the washing machine or run the dishwasher. No more waiting until the water heater recovers to take a shower. The tankless design and computerized temperature control insure the unit will provide an endless supply of hot water at the desired temperature. The electronic ignition feature means that gas is consumed only when you are using the hot water. No energy is wasted when hot water is not in use. Features:
• Endless hot water

- Space saving
- Highly energy efficient saves money.
- Made using the best materials for durability and long life

For more information, please contact your licensed plumbing contractor or Advance Plumbing Supply Company at 248-669-7474.



Jeffrey Moss is vice-president of Advance Plumbing Supply Co. in Wall Lake and Detroit. Call (800) 560-7474 toll-free. Have a plumbing question? Write to Jeffrey at Advance Plumbing Supply Co., 1977 E.W. Maple Rd., Wall Lake, MI 48390. www.advanceplumbing.com

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