

# GOOD GREEN KITCHENS

The Ultimate Resource for Creating a Beautiful, Healthy, Eco-Friendly Kitchen



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The main work surfaces are durable, recyclable stainless steel. The rich-hued floor is FSC-certified solid Brazilian cherry from EcoTimber. The refrigerator and dishwasher are Energy Star approved. The skylight's deep well provides diffuse daylight and minimizes glare.

nearly as common as it once was, and the look of wood counters doesn't appeal to everyone. The no-frills persona of a scarred and stained butcher block may be out of place in more formal kitchens. That said, a counter of lustrous, richly hued hardwood could be right at home in the most elegant of kitchens.

An FSC-certified or salvaged wood counter probably comes closest to the dream green countertop I described earlier. Wood is a renewable resource. Wood-countertop manufacturing requires minimal processing. Often, wooden work surfaces are fabricated locally by woodworkers or do-it-yourselfers. Wood counters are resilient and can be refinished easily. At the end of their life as counters, the wood can potentially be reused or recycled.

Environmentally preferable wood counters are made from FSC-certified wood or salvaged wood. FSC certification pro-

vides assurance that the wood came from a sustainable forestry operation. Salvaged sources run the gamut from old wood counters rescued from another kitchen to timbers reclaimed from a dismantled building to storm-felled trees from your neighborhood that might otherwise have been burned for firewood or chipped for mulch.

Don't buy counters made with tropical hardwoods unless they have the FSC seal of approval. Keep in mind that while the manufacturer or retailer may have FSC certification, the products they sell are not necessarily all certified; this is an important point to clarify before making a purchase.

Some wood counters have such a finely finished and sealed surface that you wouldn't dream of putting a knife to them. Others are utilitarian butcher blocks that practically beg for the cleaver. While dense maple is the most common butcher-block material, a wide variety of hardwoods make suitable cutting surfaces. Even softwoods such as pine can be used, but be prepared for more scratches and dents and periodic refinishing.

Solid wood counters not intended as cutting surfaces



The bar top is a slab of salvaged black acacia.

are often finished with a plastic polyurethane-type sealant. This finish may be factory applied or applied in your home after the counters are installed; if applied in your kitchen, insist on a water-based, low VOC product to protect air quality. For a true butcher block intended for use as a cutting surface, forgo the poly-

urethane and apply an oil to provide resistance to heat, stains, and moisture; use mineral oil, tung oil, or linseed oil, not food-grade oil that might go rancid. Reapply the oil periodically to protect the wood.

Prices for wood counters range from low to expensive, depending on the species, thickness, edge detailing, and other factors. Wood counters are relatively easy to work with and install. They can be installed directly on cabinets without

Bamboo, a rapidly renewable resource, can be used to make cabinets and counters, such as in this unique kitchen by Laguna Bamboo.



underlayment, which reduces resource use. Also, they can be mechanically fastened rather than glued down, which makes refinishing, remodeling, and even deconstruction easier in the future.

Wood countertops do come with some caveats. While some people install wood counters around their sinks, it's generally not recommended in areas where there's likely to be standing water; if exposed to excessive moisture, the wood may warp or rot. Wood counters installed over a dishwasher should have a moisture barrier on their underside.

### Bamboo

Bamboo is a rapidly renewable resource that provides the warmth, natural look, and durability of wood, although it's actually a giant grass. It's an increasingly popular material for floors and cabinets. Bamboo cutting boards are readily available from housewares retailers, but bamboo counters are still relatively uncommon. Contact cabinetmakers who work with bamboo for custom bamboo counters. Keep in mind that most bamboo comes from China, so if you prefer to source local materials, a domestic wood might be a better choice. For more information about bamboo, see chapter two.

### Resources

Butcher-block and solid wood counters can be custom fabricated by local woodworkers from FSC-certified or salvaged hardwood. Make sure the glue used is water resistant and FDA approved for cutting boards if you plan to use them as a cutting surface. If custom counters aren't in your budget, look to retailers who have made public commitments to supporting sustainable forestry. Global retailer Ikea, for example, tells its suppliers that they must not "use wood originating from national parks, nature reserves, intact natural forests or any areas with officially declared high conservation values, unless certified."

- **Endura Wood Products.** Butcher-block countertops made with FSC-certified Oregon white oak and Eastern hard-rock maple. Portland, Oregon, 503.233.7090, [endurawood.com](http://endurawood.com).
- **Spekva A/S.** Danish manufacturer of wood counters, some of which are FSC certified. Available from North American distributors, [spekva.com](http://spekva.com).
- **Smith & Fong.** Manufacturer of Plyboo laminated bamboo panels used for making cabinet, counter and table tops, and furniture. South San Francisco, California, 866.835.9859, [plyboo.com](http://plyboo.com).
- **Windfall Lumber Products.** Butcher block from wood