

# hard or soft?

Trying to choose between carpet and timber? Both flooring options have eco-friendly aspects.

When it comes to flooring, most of us fall squarely into one camp or the other: we're either in love with our timber floors or couldn't imagine life without carpet. While we aim to choose flooring that suits our lifestyle, home décor and personal preferences, today, more of us are looking at the eco-friendly aspects of the materials we choose to live with.

To protect your health and minimise harm to the environment, the Government-sponsored Smarter Homes website ([www.smarterhomes.org.nz](http://www.smarterhomes.org.nz)) recommends looking for flooring materials that are durable, do not emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs), can be recycled, and are made from sustainably sourced natural materials or from recycled materials. So how do carpet and timber stack up as flooring options?

## Carpet – covering your bases

Carpet adds a whole range of benefits to your living environment. It reduces noise through sound absorption; provides warmth, comfort and insulation; is slip resistant, hardwearing and easy to clean; and offers design versatility thanks to the extensive colour, pile and pattern choices available.

As a natural thermal insulator and a low conductor of heat, carpet can make a measurable impact on energy savings. It's been estimated that wool carpet, in particular, will reduce a household's energy costs in both heating and cooling by 8% to 12%.

Wool carpet offers additional advantages in that it's inherently flame retardant and hard to ignite. As well as being a renewable resource, wool is biodegradable.

Among the myths associated with carpet is that it collects dust and allergens making it bad for asthmatics and allergy sufferers. But, with regular vacuuming, carpet can create a healthy living environment. Carpet fibres also trap dust, pollen and pet dander, reducing their continued circulation in the air until they're removed by vacuuming.

According to Wools of New Zealand, wool absorbs common contaminants such as formaldehyde, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide, and will not re-emit them into the air, even when heated. It has been claimed that wool carpets can continually purify indoor air for up to 30 years.

While carpet isn't as hard wearing as solid timber or other hard flooring options, high-quality carpets are certainly made to last. Be sure to select the right carpet for your specific requirement. For example, choose a shorter-pile, more tightly woven carpet for high-traffic areas such as entranceways and halls. Modular carpet squares are ideal for kids' bedrooms and rumpus rooms. If there's a stain, you can simply pull up that square and have it cleaned or replace it altogether with minimal fuss and cost.



