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Growing Green

ECO-FRIENDLY HOME FURNISHINGS FLOURISH

In Fashion
HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Floor Show
RUGS! RUGS! RUGS!

Making A Difference
THE NATURAL CHOICE

Growing Green

ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY HOME FURNISHINGS BECOME MORE AVAILABLE, AFFORDABLE, AND FASHIONABLE



Right: The Natural Bedroom features mattresses, mattress pads, comforters, and pillows filled with high-quality, certified organically grown wool and covered with natural, undyed cotton fabric shells, from Crown City Mattress (626-452-8617).

Above & below: California-based Earthsake (510-848-5023), a seven-unit specialty store group, offers a full range of environmentally-friendly home furnishings, including organic wool, cotton, and natural latex mattresses; organic wool and cotton mattress pads, pillows and comforters; and cotton and linen sheets, comforters, duvets, and accessories. The retailer also sells through its Web site, www.earthsake.com.



“It ain’t easy bein’ green”—but it is definitely easier to “be green” today than it was when Muppets star Kermit the Frog first uttered those sentiments more than two decades ago.

Although consumer attitudes toward environmentally-friendly products have fluctuated over the years, manufacturers and retailers report that sales of natural home furnishings and accessories are steadily increasing. This is due to a number of reasons. One is more manufacturers offering earth-friendly products. Also as green alternatives have proliferated, prices have come down. Additionally, green products are perceived as more fashionable and, in many cases, more luxurious. And, among younger consumers, eco-friendly fabrics, such as hemp, are hip.

Consumer surveys consistently point out that Americans are concerned about the environment and interested in buying green products. Two out of three Americans say we need to protect the environment no matter what it costs, according to an

annual tracking study conducted by the research and consulting firm Wirthlin Worldwide.

Americans also feel that environmental protection should not be a barrier to commerce. According to a 1999 survey by The National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF) and the Roper Starch Worldwide research firm, 61% of Americans believe that environmental protection and economic development can go hand in hand.

Another Roper Starch survey, commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, reports that more than two-thirds of all Americans believe it is possible for economic development and environmental protection to be achieved simultaneously. Also almost 80% of Americans say they are likely to have more positive feelings about companies that are in some way associated with an environmental group, and almost 75% say they are likely to buy the company’s products or services, the report reveals.

Americans’ concern with the

environment is expressed through purchasing power, although shoppers still do not have access to as many green products as they would potentially buy. “About 85% of Americans consider themselves ‘pro-environment,’ and about half do something green,” points out Dr. Paul H. Ray, co-author of *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World*. “But there are many shades of green, depending on two things: how much they can afford and how much information they have. In a time-pressured consumer world, the failure of companies to get better, easier-to-understand consumer information is deadly. This 85% of Americans, but especially the Cultural Creatives, are frustrated that regular products are not more green at standard prices. They believe that companies should do technological innovation and be green because it’s the right thing to do.”

Healthy-home consultant Mary Cordaro, director of the H3Environmental showroom in California, notes that sales of green products

Right: Eco-Bamboo is an all-cotton, Oriental-inspired jacquard tapestry pattern available in all-natural hues as well as vegetable-dyed shades such as Driftwood, a soft green. The pattern is part of the Eco-Ordinates collection from Park B. Smith Ltd. (212-889-1818).

Below: All-cotton ticking, batting, and even cotton thread are used to construct a full line of bed pillows, including travel pillows. The 100% cotton pillows are available in unbleached, undyed ecru, white, or classic blue-and-white ticking stripe from KB Cotton Pillows (800-544-3752).



are increasing because of educational efforts. "Slowly but surely, people are starting to understand what goes into the products they purchase and understand how those products can affect personal health and the health of the planet," she says.

Growth has been most dramatic in the food sector. According to the trade publication *Natural Foods Merchandiser*, the natural products market is worth \$28 billion per year, and sales of natural products grew 11% from 1998 to 1999.

"Sales of green products are increasing in virtually every consumer product category, from foods to paints to cleaning products," points out Debra Lynn Dadd, consultant and author of *Home Safe Home*, a book about decreasing household toxins. "Just look at what has happened in organic foods. Today we have natural food supermarkets, we have organic food sections in regular supermarkets, and we even have organic restaurants. Sales are definitely moving into the mainstream."

Home furnishings suppliers,

however, have not taken full advantage of the growth in green products. Only a handful of companies offer environmentally-friendly items. "I would say the home furnishings industry has done the poorest job in terms of developing green products and making them available to the average person," Dadd states. "Home furnishings manufacturers are missing out on a very real sales opportunity. Other industries have already built the customer base."

Mark Petrucci, director of certification for Green Seal, a nonprofit agency that evaluates and certifies green products, comments, "Many companies are realizing that green products are good for business, both from a sales and a public relations standpoint. Unfortunately, the home furnishings market hasn't been out in front of this issue."

Joel Makower, editor of *The Green Business Letter* and creator of GreenBiz.com, a nonprofit resource center on corporate environmental responsibility, points out that companies should not "underestimate the

Below: Habidecor (800-588-8565) offers a wide variety of luxurious all-natural bath and accent rugs, including styles constructed of organic cotton as well as designs created using naturally colored cottons in green and brown shades.





Above: In its California showroom, H3Environmental (818-766-1787) features completely accessorized bedroom settings including all-natural beds from Samina and bed linens from Indika (shown). H3Environmental also showcases beds from Crown City Mattress and linens from Coyuchi and The Purists collection by SDH Enterprises.

Below: The Luxury European Sleep System provides comfort and support and uses the finest natural materials, including mattress toppers, bed pillows, and duvets made of merino wool and covered in organic Egyptian cotton; mattresses constructed of natural latex foam; and wood frames and slats constructed of natural, untreated ash. All are available from Samina (516-869-6004).



power of consumers' current purchasing habits to have a powerful and positive leveraging impact on the environment. Individuals' purchasing decisions affect not only the products and services we buy directly, but also can be felt far up the supply chain, where much of the worst environmental damage is done: in the forests, oceans, mines, farms, and other places that are the source of raw materials for many, many products. Put another way, the \$6.7 trillion spent each year by U.S. consumers can have a ripple effect on 'upstream' industrial activity: raw materials sourcing, processing, manufacturing,

packaging, marketing, shipping, and the myriad other aspects of making a product and bringing it to market."

Greening Up

Interest in natural home furnishings is being spurred by a number of factors, first and foremost of which is availability. "Natural products are becoming more popular because there are many more choices available today," explains Mark Martin, principal of the on-line store Eco-Choices. "At the same time, people are much more concerned about the ecological situation of the planet."

David Sparrow, owner of on-line retailer A Happy Planet, says, "There are more and more companies offering eco-friendly products, following leads of European makers who have proved eco-sensibility equals long-term profitability."

The past three years have seen dramatic increases in sales growth for some retailers of green products. For example, the seven-store California specialty chain Earthsake is "running 17-to-18% comp-store increases," according to Paul Hirschberger, president and chief executive officer. "Our customers are interested in healthy and natural lifestyles, and they are making an investment in their homes."

The Internet has had a powerful impact on the green market, making information and products more readily available to a broader base of consumers. "The Internet allows anyone to have access to information about green products, and also allows people to *buy* green products from anywhere in the world," declares Tom Kay, co-founder of the on-line Eco-Mall, a Web directory with links to more than 300 on-line retailers of earth-friendly products. "As soon as people are aware that there is a choice between a toxic and a non-toxic environment, they are choosing to purchase healthier products."

Green Supply

Consumer demand is creating substantial sales growth for existing suppliers of earth-friendly home furnishings, and, in some cases, opening up new channels of distribution for the home industry, including organic food stores, environmentally oriented catalogs, and Web sales.

"Our sales have increased 30-to-40% each year for the last three years," notes Chuck Blumenthal, president of Bean Products, Inc., a bedding and accessories manufacturer offering products made from organic buckwheat hulls, hemp, unbleached cotton, flaxseed fill, EcoFleece recycled fleece, recycled polyester fiber from soda bottles, and recycled polystyrene filling.

"We're growing by 30% a year," declares Steve Carwile, president and chief executive of Crown City Mattress, a supplier of mattresses and bedding. "The Baby Boomers are a lot more health-conscious; they don't want to sleep on something that has a lot of chemicals in it."

The growth in green products has fostered new companies including Samina, which offers luxury all-natural mattresses, and Indika, which designs beautiful earth-friendly bed linens.

"Our two companies together, Samina and Indika, have gotten very

good placement among retailers in the United States and Canada," remarks Bettina Waldraff, director of marketing for Samina. "People are more interested in a healthier lifestyle, and we are helping them rejuvenate their bodies by providing products that promote a good night's sleep."

The interest in green products is also prompting more companies to offer all-natural home furnishings as an alternative within their existing lines. Park B. Smith Ltd., for instance, offers the Eco-Ordinates line of all-cotton, vegetable-dyed bedding and accessories and has steadily expanded the line.

"We have seen a real increase in interest in all-natural rugs without chemicals or dyes," notes Katie Johnson-Hill, vice president of U.S. operations for Habidecor. "Some people buy them because they have problems with chemicals or allergies, but other people like them because they are luxurious and beautiful."

Green People

Who is buying green products? A wide variety of consumers seek out green products—some because they believe in using their purchasing power to protect the planet, some because they have allergies or chemical sensitivities, and some just like the look and feel of all-natural products.

The Wirthlin Report identifies population segments that are more likely to purchase green products. For example, 73% of women support environmental improvements, regardless of cost, versus 58% of men surveyed, a fact that is particularly relevant to the home furnishings industry.

"Almost everyone has the potential to be a green consumer," states Bill Giebler, merchandising manager for Harmony catalog and on-line retailer Gaiam. "Most people inherently want to do the right thing for the planet. As soon as people understand the impact of their choices, they almost always choose to buy a



Above & left: Organic fibers such as hemp, silk, and organically grown cottons are woven into elegant and beautiful bed and bath linens by Indika (800-290-7093). The company also uses organic dyes and mordents to create richly patterned prints.

healthier, earth-friendly product."

"There is no real 'typical' customer," contends Cathy Stemmler, national sales manager for SDH Enterprises, which markets The Purists line. "We target the luxury consumer, as well as the environmentally conscious shopper. People who have allergies buy our products as well. We also have a strong core of customers who simply like 'natural' as a color—it has become a style statement."

Sparrow of A Happy Planet divides green consumers into two categories. "The hard cores who will always choose the more eco-friendly product at almost any monetary cost; and the general greenies who are leaning in that direction but haven't quite made the plunge and still compromise a lot. The typical green consumer is educated and family-oriented, likes pets and plants, and expects personal assistance when making buying decisions that affect her/his family. The green consumer is typically female; women seem to get it from an instinctual point of view."

Lauren Laster, founder of sales organization L. Laster & Co., says, "Green customers are aware of plan-

etary pollution. They are mothers, students, activists, children, and the like. Somewhere along the line a shift in thinking takes place. People ask themselves, 'What am I buying? Do I need it? Where was it made, how and by whom was it made?' They are buying products that have the least impact on the planet."

Below: The Champs Elysée bedroom ensemble from The Purists collection features an intricate foliage pattern constructed of all-natural tussah silk and is available from SDH Enterprises (800-244-2688).





Left & right: Organic cotton knit bedding and crib bedding is made from soft and luxurious organic Peruvian ring-spun cotton yarn, sold on line by Maggie's Functional Organics, www.organicclothes.com (800-609-8593).



People who are sensitive or allergic to chemicals are a special subset of the green consumer base. "A lot of people have allergies today, and people are more aware of the benefits of sleeping with natural, pure bedding," explains Kaye Behrens, president of KB Cotton Pillows. "I started making all-cotton pillows 20 years ago because of my own allergies, and we have seen a steady increase in sales."

Spring Green

Younger consumers seem more interested in buying green, and today's Gen X and Gen Y shoppers are more environmentally aware

than any other group since the '60s. The Wirthlin Report notes that 78% of Americans under the age of 35 support environment improvements, compared to 62% of those aged 35-to-54 and 61% of those 55 and older.

"Gen X and Gen Y consumers tend to be more open-minded about new things, and more optimistic than older consumers," states Lester Kau, a principal of on-line store EcoChoices. "They have a greater sense of ownership—the feeling that this is our planet and we need to take care of it. There is also a rebellion aspect to buying natural products, such as hemp, that appeals to younger consumers."

Carwile of Crown City Mattress remarks, "The Gen X and Gen Y consumers are much more savvy buyers than we were at their age. They look at natural products and realize that the products are more durable and will last them longer, so they are willing to pay a little more. Also, they are very concerned about buying healthier products."

Price, however, is often a deterrent to those who are moving into first apartments and are new to buying home furnishings as green products often are priced higher than conventional alternatives. "Younger consumers are far more receptive to green products of all kinds, but have less buying power and have to spend on normal family formation items, so they cannot act on their preferences," explains author Ray.

Below: Pacific Rim makes handcrafted maple wood cribs and bedroom furniture from managed forests in Washington and Oregon. The furniture can be left untreated for a natural appearance or finished with tung oil and beeswax. The products are sold on line by Nirvana Safe Haven, www.nontoxic.com (800-968-9355).



Greenbacks

Price sensitivity may be one reason why home furnishings firms have not taken full advantage of the opportunities presented by green marketing. "Nobody wants to pay more than a 5-to-10% premium," Ray adds. "Above that, if there isn't extra value for money, they feel they are getting ripped off. They really believe it's up to business to both innovate and hold down prices, because it's business that caused the environmental problems in the first place."

Cordaro of H3Environmental remarks, "Price can sometimes be a deterrent, but if we've done our job of educating consumers, they will usually be willing to spend more on the healthier product."

A number of retailers and suppliers point out that environmentally-friendly products may at first *seem* more expensive, but in reality, these products are quite economical because they last longer and perform better.

For instance, Julia Fry, founder of Vaska, a specialty retailer who developed a line of all-natural laundry soaps, points out, "Our box of soap powder retails for \$18, but it lasts for two months, so it is really comparable in price to conventional detergents. Also, detergents don't really work well, because they are basically just chemicals and scents. Soap leaves fabrics softer, they have more body, and they last longer. Plus, we use lavender as an astringent agent to rinse out the soap residue, so there is no scent left after the fabrics are laundered."

Also, as green products become more widely available, prices are coming down. "As consumer demand for organic cotton has grown, more and more organic cotton is being planted," notes Giebler of Harmony and Gaiam. "This is bringing prices on organic cotton more in line with conventional cotton."

Mic LeBel, spokesman for on-line retailer Maggie's Functional Organics,

agrees, noting, "Organic cotton products are experiencing rapid growth. U.S. farmers in 1999 planted approximately 16,413 acres of organic cotton, a 75% increase over 1998, according to the Organic Trade Association."

Green Chic

All-natural products aren't just better for the planet, they are also fashion forward. "Natural, subdued colors are very popular, and the fact that the products have no chemicals or dyes is an added benefit," points out Kelli Monk, co-founder of the Philadelphia specialty store Kelli Jane. "Some of the things that the manufacturers have done with textures are very refined and beautiful, such as the SDH fleur de lis and herringbone weaves and Coyuchi's lovely wovens."

Leslie Hudson Needleman, marketing director for Peacock Alley, remarks, "Natural is definitely a style issue for us. We are known for offering fashionable, all-cotton products in beautiful, natural ecru. The natural products also have a wonderful, soft hand. Our natural blanket, for example, is incredibly soft and luxurious. The styling is why most people buy the products—although there are some customers who purchase because of the environmental benefit."

"Green products are becoming more stylish," asserts Valborg Linn, director of design and merchandising for Park B. Smith. "We are offering many more constructions, including open weaves, damask tapestries, half-tone/combo colors, new textures, and embellishments."

One of the hottest new fabrics is hemp, which epitomizes the natural look as well as offering "counter-culture" appeal. "People are appreciating hemp; they understand that it is a great and durable fabric," notes Laster.

LeBel of Maggie's Organics also points to hemp as one of the most stylish new natural products. "Hemp products are enormously popular these days. Consumers



are demanding these products, and companies are growing rapidly to meet the demand."

Bright Green

Sales of green products are expected to continue to flourish in the coming years, as consumer awareness continues to grow. "We plan to add more natural styles next year," notes Johnson-Hill of Habidecor. "Eventually, we will offer an all-natural alternative in every style of rug in our line."

Specialty retailer Hirschberger of Earthsake notes, "I believe there is a growing understanding about how our environment affects us physically and mentally. More and more people are being educated about what they put in their bodies and with what they surround themselves in their homes.

If you give people a choice between something grown organically and something grown using pesticides and chemicals, they will almost always choose the healthier product."

Consumer concern about dangerous chemicals, pollution, and the impact of everyday purchases on the environment is likely to increase as ecological issues become more urgent.

"We're facing serious environmental issues, such as global climate change, decreasing availability of fossil fuels, and endangered water supplies," remarks Giebler of Harmony and Gaia. "As people become more aware of the impact of chemicals on themselves and on the planet, they are looking to reduce their purchases of those products. People are taking their health, and the health of the planet, a lot more seriously." □

Above: The Sleeping Bean body pillow is designed to conform naturally to the human body and to allow sleeping in the healthiest possible position. The Sleeping Bean is made from pure cotton and stuffed with premium poly-fiber, white goose feather, natural kapok, or premium recycled poly-fiber. This all-natural hemp shower curtain is simple yet stylish, constructed of extremely strong, durable, and beautiful hemp fabric that is naturally resistant to mildew and bacteria. The hemp fabric is grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers. Both are available from Bean Products, www.beanproducts.com (800-726-8365).



Below: Allyson is inspired by a 19th-century European design with delicate florals and a coordinating border design. The collection is constructed of 100% Egyptian cotton as is Duet II, a cotton, damask stripe sheeting collection that is mercerized to maintain a lustrous hand and appearance. The Natural Blanket from Peacock Alley (800-810-0708) has the look and feel of cashmere and is constructed of 100% Egyptian cotton.