

The Sensible Environmentalist

Renewability Important, Not Timing

(NAPSA)—**DEAR DR. MOORE:**

Do you agree that it's better to use building materials with short growing cycles, such as bamboo and straw, instead of wood?



Dr. Moore

This is one of those myths that tend to be promoted as fact.

If the choice is between a material that comes from a renewable resource and one that doesn't, then yes, bamboo and straw are good options. But the idea that a short growing cycle is inherently better than a long one makes zero ecological sense.

First, it's arbitrary. It's based on the fact that 80 years for humans is a lifetime and it seems somehow negative, from an emotional point of view, to harvest a forest that began growing before we were born. I can appreciate the sentiment but it has nothing to do with the environment.

There is no way that it's better to dedicate more land for bamboo than it is to grow more forests. Even the most basic monoculture pine plantation has more biodiversity and provides habitat for more wildlife than bamboo, straw or any of the "rapidly renewable" materials. Among their many benefits, forests also contribute to soil and water quality and

absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide.

There are those who think that using other materials will "save" forests from harvesting. However, while I'm glad that North America has a larger area of parks and protected forests than any other region in the world, it's a flawed argument. By far the biggest cause of deforestation is conversion of lands for agriculture—which is precisely what happens when forests are lost in favor of short rotation crops.

On the other hand, I believe that using wood promotes the retention of forest cover. If there's a market for wood products, landowners have an incentive not only to keep their forests healthy but to keep them as forests. Here in North America, where demand for wood is high, forests actually cover the same amount of land as they did 100 years ago.

As a sensible environmentalist, I believe that forests are beneficial to the environment in so many ways that it just makes sense to maintain as much forested land as possible—and to use the wood that grows in those forests.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.