

Buying Guide for Natural Upholstery Materials

Are you seeking healthy materials for your furniture? Whether you're a maker, a designer, an upholsterer, or you're having some upholstery work done for you, I hope this guide will help you find the right materials and give you a starting point to use them.

LATEX FOAM (certifications ensure that you are getting a toxin-free product)

Latex Foam is a healthy alternative to urethane foam, which is a petroleum-based product which has historically contained flame retardants that can pose health risks in the home. It's important to note that all latex is NOT necessarily free of harmful chemicals. When buying latex foam for upholstery, look for a third party certification to ensure the product is free of toxins. For latex, the most common trusted certifications are **Oeko-Tex** and **GOLS**.

100% Natural latex is made entirely from the sap of the rubber tree. Some benefits of natural rubber latex include:

- resistance to dust mites
- anti-microbial
- anti-fungal
- hypo-allergenic
- longer life than urethane foams when protected from UV exposure

Organic latex is 100% Natural latex - with all the qualities mentioned above - which has been third-party certified by **GOLS** (the Global Organic Latex Standard) to be grown & produced under their strict requirements.

Synthetic latex is petroleum-based, containing a blend of natural latex mixed with either urethane or styrene-butadiene (SBR). It has a similar look and feel to the '100% natural' latex foam described above. Unfortunately, there has been significant confusion around the terminology that companies use to describe their products. Some may refer to synthetic latex as 'natural latex'. If there's any doubt, be sure to ask about the content of the foam specifically. Since styrene is a human carcinogen, you may seek the Oeko-Tex or GOLS certification, which ensures there are no ingredients that are harmful to human health.

URETHANE FOAM (is it free of flame retardants?)

As of late 2013, the furniture and bedding industries are no longer required to use flame retardant-treated foam. However, just because they aren't required doesn't mean flame retardants are not present, since flame retardants take many different forms. Again, be sure to ask for a third party certification if there is any doubt in your mind.

WOOL (a naturally flame-retardant alternative for upholstery batting)

Wool batting is widely recommended as a replacement for dacron polyester in wrapping cushions. It is an officially accepted flame retardant barrier layer according to Cal TB-117-2013, a California law governing furniture sold in that state and the rest of the U.S. ([read more about the law](#)).

Some wool batting comes with a thin spun backing which you can use to stitch or staple the batting in place around a cushion or upholstery, which prevents the wool from sticking to everything and shifting as you work with it. If your batting does not come with this layer, I recommend a thin fabric such as a stretchy gauze to hold the wool in place as you work with it.

TICKING (prevents wool fibers from migrating through outermost fabric layer)

Unless your fabric is leather, or has a rubberized backing or other natural barrier, be sure to use a ticking fabric layer between the wool and your upholstery fabric to prevent 'migration' of the wool fibers, causing unsightly pilling on the surface of your fabric. The ticking will also offer an additional layer of UV protection for the foam. A tightly woven natural material such as a cotton twill is recommended. This can be cut & applied as one piece along with your upholstery cover fabric, OR sewn separately (for example, you may choose to sew a separate inner cushion cover).

ORGANIC COTTON UPHOLSTERY PADDING

Eco-friendly organic cotton batting may be used as a replacement for the standard cotton batting used in conventional upholstery.

WHERE TO BUY ALTERNATIVE UPHOLSTERY MATERIALS

NaturalUpholstery.com's [Shop](#) is now selling the four natural upholstery materials mentioned here, including both GOLS and Oeko-Tex certified 100% natural latex foam, wool batting, organic cotton batting and organic cotton ticking - all free of flame retardants and other toxic chemicals.

Thanks for signing up for the Natural Upholstery.com newsletter. I'm always open to suggestions, which you can tell me about on the [Contact](#) page of the website. I look forward to sharing my favorite upholstery tools & techniques, as well as tips for using healthy natural materials in your project.

Here's to each small step we take toward a more healthy and sustainable world!

Carla Pyle
NaturalUpholstery.com