

bringing home baby

by bonnie bauman

creating an eco-safe nursery



Mommies- and daddies-to-be are hardly singing the blues (or pinks) anymore when it comes to their baby's abode. Green is now the color on many new parents' minds. And no matter the motivator, this turn toward eco-friendly nurseries is good for both baby and the environment.

As manufacturers and retailers continue to issue a seemingly unending drumbeat of recalls for items such as baby cribs, lunchboxes and dolls, it's no wonder that parents are becoming more and more concerned about environmental impacts on their children.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Mattel alone has issued 31 recalls since 1998, with three of those recalls occurring in the past six months. And analysts don't expect recalls in the toy industry to let up any time soon. Meanwhile, more and more children are facing health issues that have risen on par with the levels of environmental pollutants in the air and water, including autism and asthma.

Building an eco-friendly baby nursery is a wise choice, experts say, as newborns are especially vulnerable to the toxins in their environments. "If you create a healthy nursery, you are limiting the number of chemicals that you are adding to your baby's environment," Lisa Beres, a certified green building professional and co-founder of GreenNest.com, an e-commerce Web site that offers a range of eco-friendly products, says. "Babies spend 15 to 17 hours a day sleeping in that room," she adds, "so it's important that they are not being bombarded with toxins."

Newborns are born with an average of 200 chemicals in their bloodstream, and toxins are most harmful in brand new products, so when well-intentioned parents take their baby home to a nursery filled with unused furniture, toys, etc., it can be a potentially unhealthy atmosphere. "Parents think they're doing a good thing by making the nursery look beautiful," Beres says, "but it's more important for it to be healthy."

So how do parents go about building and decorating a nursery that's healthy?

Clean air is the foundation of a green baby nursery, Beres says. Investing in an indoor air purifier is the best way to ensure that babies are breathing the cleanest air possible. Beres recommends a purifier constructed especially for baby nurseries called Baby's Breath, which comes in a variety of pastel colors to match with any decor.

Once the air quality has been addressed, there are a handful of other issues to tackle, such as bedding. "Bedding is a biggie," Beres

says. "Babies spend a lot of time in their beds."

Mattresses are required by law to be flame-resistant, and manufacturers fulfill that requirement by loading them up with toxic chemicals to act as flame retardants—chemicals like boric acid and antimony, a chemical that is similar in molecular structure to asbestos. The way to ensure that babies aren't breathing in those harsh chemicals is to opt for a natural, organic mattress, Beres says. In these mattresses, wool acts as a natural flame retardant and the cotton they are made with is free of pesticides. It's also important to make the bed with pillows, blankets and linens that are free of pesticides.

Another important element in a green nursery is the paint. Although paint manufactured today is free of lead, the majority of paint on the market does contain what are called volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. VOCs are carbon-containing chemical compounds that evaporate into the air and form pollutants. A green baby nursery has paint with no or low amounts of VOCs.

Also, when it comes to flooring, wooden flooring is more environmentally friendly than carpeting, which can harbor tens of millions of microorganisms, along with dust, dander and pollen. Plus, it's easier to clean.

Another important piece in the puzzle is the use of environmentally friendly cleaning supplies. Many parents today are germophobes, Beres says. They work overtime to clean and disinfect their babies' nurseries using cleaning supplies that contain harmful toxins. The truth of the matter is that babies are equipped with immune systems designed to fight off germs, but their bodies are not equipped to fight the harmful effects of the chemicals contained in cleaning supplies, she adds.

In addition to what goes into setting up the nursery, parents should also focus on how their baby's day-to-day routine is impacted by environmental issues. For instance, it's a good idea for parents to buy a bath filter to filter out the high amounts of chlorine in tap water, Beres says. And plastic bottles (and toys) should be avoided because chemicals in plastic are leached into the liquid within. With all of the recent toy recalls, it's also a good idea for parents to pay attention to what toys they're giving their babies, keeping in mind that most of those things will end up in their mouths.

For her part, in addition to selling a wide variety of eco-friendly products on her Web site, Beres, who also has a background in interior design, travels the country consulting with parents and helping them build and decorate green nurseries.

Beres's most recent clients were Ryan and Trista Sutter, the couple

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that fell in love on the popular reality TV show *The Bachelorette*. Trista gave birth to the couple's son, Max (short for Maxwell), back in July. Living in Colorado, a state with a large population of eco-aware citizens, Ryan and Trista had been living in an environmentally friendly way for a while. Trista drives a hybrid, they recycle and they try to conserve as much energy as possible. In fact, next year the couple plans to build a new green home.

When the couple found out they were going to have a baby, they wanted to make sure that their environmental philosophies spilled over into their child's own immediate environment, Trista says. So with the help of Beres, the couple built their green nursery. Among other things, they had the nursery painted with paint that contained no VOCs, invested in an air purifier and purchased an organic mattress, linens, pillows and blankets for the baby's bed and the daybed in the nursery. "We wanted to ensure that Max

spends his days in the most safe and healthy way possible," says the TV star, who recently combined her passions for motherhood and green living in a new line of eco-friendly diaper bags.

While it's true that many eco-friendly building supplies and products are more expensive than their counterparts, environmentalists point out that part of being an eco-friendly consumer is to actually consume less. Beres suggests that parents register for the supplies and products parents need to build their green nursery and ask that friends and relatives who wish to give them gifts contribute to their cost, instead of buying the newest gadgets and toys that will eventually be outgrown and forgotten. If parents focus on the basics and avoid the temptation to spend money on extraneous things, Beres says, they can offset the higher costs of the green products they buy.

Photography provided by Green Nest

