



Eco-friendly bedding for pocket pets includes those made from paper byproducts, such as Kaytee's Soft-Sorbent bedding.



## Greener Bedding for Pocket Pets

The growing popularity of eco-friendly bedding has small animals lying down in greener pastures. **By Lisa Plummer**

**E**arth-friendly animal products cover creatures great and small: People are writing on stationery made out of elephant dung while guinea pigs, rats and hamsters are nestling down in reclaimed cellulose, post-consumer recyclables and leftover corncobs.

Bedding made from straw and corncobs has been around for decades, but it's now falling into a new class of environmentally friendly product that's part of a burgeoning green movement, according to folks like Holly Hoffman, marketing director for Vitakraft Sun Seed Co. of Bowling Green, Ohio. "The industry itself is evolving—we are all working to create new foods, beddings and accessories to improve and enrich the lives of our pets," she said. "I suspect that this trend will continue well into the future."

New products mean new territory to navigate. When you're selling eco-friendly bedding, you've got to be able to answer questions like, "What's the difference between post-consumer and recycled?" and "What's an agricultural byproduct?"

Here's a look at a variety of green beddings, terminology to know and important details to help answer your customers' questions.

### Recycled Paper Bedding

Used periodicals are a popular ingredient in green bedding because the end product is recyclable, absorbent and great for nesting. Companies use various methods to enhance their products' absorption or appearance.

Fresh World Bedding, unveiled last spring by Vitakraft, features vibrant colors but is made from unbleached,

### TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

◆ **Post-consumer paper products.** These include office wastepaper, junk mail, magazines, etc.

◆ **Pre-consumer paper products.** These include extra copies of a magazine or paper trimmings, printed by a manufacturer as allowable waste.

◆ **Recycled paper products.** These contain recovered fiber from either pre- or post-consumer products.

Source: Environmental Paper Network

post-consumer newspaper and magazines. The crumbled pellets—made with high-density fibers—contain baking soda for long-lasting odor control. The nontoxic bedding comes in gray, purple and pink, and it's colorfast so critters won't end up with dyed fur.

The product's high density makes it more absorbent than most paper beddings, and it's comfortable for pets, said Hoffman. "Compared to other pellet products, we find the crumbled pellet to be softer underfoot than the full-size pellet, providing not only greater comfort for small animals—and burrowing fun for little rodents—but also increased surface area for absorption of urine," she said.

Eco-Bedding from FiberCore L.L.C., based in Cleveland, Ohio, evolved from packing material to pet bedding. It's made of 100 percent post-consumer paper fibers, which are shredded into eighth-inch strips and folded accordion-style to create absorbent, dust-free bedding. The crinkled design makes it soft and springy to encourage nesting, foraging and tunneling, according to Brian Wood, president of FiberCore.

He said FiberCore integrates the health of the environment with the health of an animal. "Enrichment is more than just dropping a plastic house into the mouse cage," Wood said. "To be beneficial, environmentally friendly enrichment has to be



Eco-Bedding from FiberCore L.L.C. uses a unique accordion-style fold to increase absorption.



Made from reclaimed cellulose, CareFresh now is available in a variety of colors.

biologically relevant. Unlike most other bedding materials, Eco-Bedding encourages natural nesting instincts and allows small pets to build complex nests. Additionally, good nesting [and] enrichment reduces aggression and other undesirable behaviors.”

### Paper Byproduct Bedding

Byproducts are extra materials that result from manufacturing processes. Paper-making, for example, produces extra wood fibers and cellulose, which can be utilized to make bedding.

CareFresh from Absorption Corp. in Ferndale, Wash., is made from reclaimed cellulose. The original product debuted 15 years ago, but today comes in different varieties based on performance and appearance: Original, Colors, Ultra and new Confetti.

CareFresh was the first eco-friendly bedding on the market, long before there was a consumer demand for green products, said Tom Pletcher, director of marketing at Absorption Corp. “What makes CareFresh-brand pet bedding eco-friendly is a combination of beneficial reuse in raw materials, minimal post-use impact on the environment, and intentional manufacturing and logistic practices that reduce the product’s carbon footprint and minimize [an] adverse impact on the environment,” Pletcher said.

Kaytee Products Inc., based in Chilton, Wis., converts wood fibers into soft, absorbent bedding, sanitized to help control bacteria. It comes in two versions that both promote nesting: Total Comfort has a fluffier consistency great for burrowing, and Soft-Sorbent Natural Scents contains natural aromas like lavender, mint and

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rose that create a soothing and uplifting environment.

“The superior odor control and absorption help keep pets in a healthy environment, as well as making the environment in a pet family’s home better,” said Rich Bonkowski, Kaytee’s director of marketing and product development. “In addition, the fact that these materials are made from recycled materials helps make for a better world.”

**Plant-Based Beddings**

Straw is simply what’s left over after a grain or seed is harvested. That agricultural byproduct has long been used for animal bedding because it’s natural, usually chemical-free and made from renewable resources. Straw also is safe if consumed by animals.

Giving straw another life diverts waste from landfills and saves it from being burned, helping farmers and the



Eco-Straw, from Oxbow Animal Health, is made from high-fiber wheat straw and can absorb up to 300 percent of its weight in moisture.

environment, said Lori Abbott, office manager for Mountain Meadows Pet. Her company, based in Lewistown, Mont., has sold pellet bedding made mostly from winter wheatgrass straw for 25 years.

Even a veteran product like Critter Country has seen a bump in interest tied to the green movement. “We’ve had a lot of people call to ask about [our product], with the ‘going green’

thing,” Abbott said. “After the pet food scare, people are paying more attention to what they’re giving their pets.”

Eco-Straw from Oxbow Animal Health of Murdock, Neb., is made from high-fiber wheat straw. It was launched in 2002 as part of the company’s Bene Terra line of organic products for small animals. Eco-Straw can absorb up to 300 percent of its weight in moisture, pulling urine down and away from the animal and keeping pets cleaner and drier, said Lucas Stock, Oxbow’s marketing communications specialist.

“Eco-Straw is produced with the health of pet and pet owner in mind,” Stock said. “[It is] produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations.”

Corncobs left behind during corn

**COMPARING GREEN BEDDING**

PRODUCT	MANUFACTURER	INGREDIENTS	BENEFITS
CareFresh	Absorption Corp.	Reclaimed cellulose	Biodegradable, compostable, flushable in small quantities. Soft. Contaminant-free, virtually dust-free, highly absorbent.
Critter Country	Mountain Meadows Pet Products	Winter wheatgrass straw	Biodegradable, compostable, flushable. Chemical- and additive-free. Odor-, mold- and dust-free. Safe if consumed.
Eco-Bedding	FiberCore	Post-consumer recycled paper fibers	Biodegradable, compostable, recyclable. Soft. Dust-free, hypoallergenic. Encourages natural behaviors.
Eco-Straw	Oxbow Animal Health	High-fiber wheat straw	Biodegradable, compostable, flushable. Chemical- and fragrance-free. Mold-resistant. Highly absorbent. Safe if consumed.
Fresh World Bedding	Vitakraft Sun Seed	Post-consumer recycled newspapers and magazines	Biodegradable and compostable. Nontoxic, phenol-free. Colorfast. Controls odors, highly absorbent.
Natural Corn Cobs	Green Pet Products	Corncobs	Biodegradable and compostable. Mold- and dust-free. Controls odors, highly absorbent.
Soft-Sorbent	Kaytee Pet Products Inc.	Paper byproducts	Flushable. Soft. Controls odors, highly absorbent. Natural Scents line has natural herbal aromas.
Total Comfort	Kaytee Pet Products Inc.	Paper byproducts	Compostable, flushable. Soft. Virtually dust-free. Controls odors.

Based on information supplied by manufacturers.



Beddings using agricultural byproducts like corn-cobs and straw are attracting increased interest thanks to the green movement.

processing represent another example of an agricultural byproduct and renewable resource that's being repurposed for pet bedding. It's popular with pet owners because it's highly absorbent and virtually dust-free.

Green Pet Products Inc. in Conrad, Iowa, spent four years in development before launching Natural Corn Cobs in 2007. Through the company's trademarked PureLite Process, the bedding is sanitized and freed of microbiological content, such as mold spores, that could be harmful to critters. "Our PureLite Process removes the bioload and provides a healthy environment for animals as well as for the pet owner," said Duane Leedy, president of Green Pet Products.

### The Value of Green Products

Green pet bedding may cost a little more, but it offers value even beyond the environmental aspect. For example, high-density materials often last longer and can be used more conservatively, stretching the consumer's dollar a little further.

"Using a high-density, highly absorbent product means that you use less for the same effect, or change beddings

## MANY ROUTES TO GREEN

**P**et bedding manufacturers and industry experts agree for the most part on what makes a product green. The most common requirements are that it's nontoxic, contaminant-free or made from a recycled or renewable resource. It also makes the grade if it is:

- ◆ Made of all-natural, chemical-free ingredients that are recyclable, biodegradable and compostable.
- ◆ Produced using soil- and water-conservation methods.
- ◆ Minimal in its post-use impact on the environment.
- ◆ Made with intentional manufacturing and logistic practices that reduce the product's carbon footprint.

—Lisa Plummer

less frequently, both of which translate to reduced cost overall," said Hoffman of Vitakraft Sun Seed. "I would suggest that the consumer think in terms of cost-per-use rather than cost-per-measurement. Ultimately, the product that best keeps your pet happy, healthy and living well in a clean, fresh environment is always the best choice."

Manufacturers are betting that environmentally conscious small-animal owners will pick the green option, if it's available. "People are becoming more aware of the ingredients in the products they purchase and the impact on their surroundings. If consumers can realize additional benefits, then they have all the more reason to choose the eco-option," said Wood of FiberCore.

Know what you're talking about when you stock eco-friendly small-animal bedding. Use the products in your store to show off different types. That will also give you the chance to evaluate performance firsthand. Staying on top of these trends will help you stay ahead of the game as the industry—green or otherwise—evolves. **pa**

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