

Dr. Mark Lung builds his home in Boise, Idaho, U.S.A., using straw-bales covered with plaster for walls.

STRAW HOUSES: ANOTHER WAY TO "GO GREEN"

What is your house made of? Building a house from concrete (a mixture of sand, water, and cement) or metal requires large amounts of energy, and it pollutes the air. Building a house from wood means cutting down trees and damaging the environment.

Builder Michael Furbish has another idea: Use straw to make buildings. "Most other building materials require a lot of energy use in production and manufacturing at a factory," explains Furbish. Straw is a kind of grass, and it takes little energy to grow. It's not very nutritious for animals, however, so farmers normally dry it and use it for animals to sleep on.

After the straw is dry, farmers use a machine to make bales—large rectangular bricks of straw. Builders such as Furbish use the bales to build walls. They cover the walls with plaster[1] inside and outside. The plaster becomes hard when it's dry, so it keeps out water as well as insects and small animals.

Furbish used about 900 straw bales for his family's two-story, three-bedroom house. His company used about 4,000 bales to build an elementary school in Maryland, U.S.A.

Do you think a straw-bale house is for you? You won't know until you try living in one, but for Furbish, it's a greener way to build.

[1] **plaster (n):** a mixture of lime, water, and sand or cement

D Complete the sentences with a coordinating conjunction.

1. You can build a house of concrete, metal, or wood, _____ you can choose greener materials.
2. Straw is easy to grow, _____ it's not very nutritious for animals.
3. Builders cover the straw bales with plaster, _____ they keep the water and insects out.
4. Furbish and his company built his house, _____ they built an elementary school.
5. Using straw is an unusual idea, _____ it is a greener way to build.

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