

Smokin' the competition
for more than 60 years.

AMERICA'S #1
CAR INSURANCE.

statefarm.com®
Click here to find a State Farm agent near you.



P060035 1/06

post-gazette**NOW**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Living

Fall Home and Garden: Bed check

From crab shells to gold, mattresses now offer a dizzying array of choices

Thursday, September 20, 2007

By Rosa Colucci, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Choosing a new mattress is a daunting proposition these days. Gone are the days when you chose from four different sizes and three levels of firmness.

Today's beds are totally high-tech "sleep surfaces" meant to eliminate any barrier that exists between you and your 40 winks. The latest in bed technology hits the spot with everything from air mattresses to high-tech foam, organic fibers to mattresses laced in 22-karat gold thread to combat allergens.

Here is a rundown on what's available:

Up in the air

Maybe you've seen the television ads in which people brag about finding their perfect "sleep number." Select Comfort commercials boast a "deep, more restorative sleep" by replacing traditional spring coils with air chambers that can be adjusted by digital remote control. The entire air chamber is surrounded by a high density foam perimeter.

Select Comfort is the best known airbed, but there are many others. Select Comfort has retail outlets where you can lie on a bed and find your ideal sleep number. A test bed is hooked up to a computer screen revealing your pressure zones in red. The salesperson inflates until the zones turn blue or green, indicating those body parts are now adequately supported.

Consumers can choose from a selection of models with different plush, pillow top and massage options, and adjustable bed frames. Most models come in single- or dual-air chambers (so each side can be individually adjusted) Prices range from \$650 for a basic twin model to \$7,248 for a top-of-the line split king. One of the most popular, an expanded queen with an 11-inch pillowtop, sells for about \$2,100. In comparison, a traditional innerspring queen mattress and boxspring sells for about \$1,000.

Foam that remembers

Memory foam is everywhere and to the casual user it's all the same, right?

Wrong.

Visco-elastic memory foam was originally developed by scientists in the NASA space program to combat the g-forces of space travel. A Swedish company purchased the rights and spent years improving memory foam to market to the public. Today, that company, Tempur-Pedic, is the leader in the industry. A queen-sized memory foam mattress by Tempur-Pedic ranges in price from \$1,200 for the original to \$5,800 for the Grand.

Memory foam is known for its therapeutic benefits because it reacts to the heat of your body and molds itself around your curves. Some manufacturers make memory foam toppers that can go on top of a traditional mattress. But if your mattress and box spring are already on

their last legs, a topper won't help.

When looking at memory foam from different manufacturers, compare the density. A good quality memory foam is 3 pounds or more, which means a cubic foot of the foam would weigh 3 pounds.

One drawback of polyurethane-based foam -- Tempur-Pedic and others -- is that it holds body heat during the night. Some people find this uncomfortable. Also, polyurethane off-gassing can be an irritant to some.

Dormia is one company using technology to dissipate the heat from memory foam. Its Cool Gel Top mattress features a dual density orthopedic foam base topped by a gel layer that disperses heat. The gel is topped with natural plush layers and encased by a breathable cover. Prices start at \$2,000.

Earth-friendly foams

The new wave of memory foams are made from natural ingredients and are more temperature resilient.

Italy-based Magniflex has introduced the GeoEthic Collection, which features soy-based visco-memory foam made with natural materials such as crab shells, seaweed and corn. It has a removable cover for cleaning and retails for about \$2,399 in queen size.

The company also has a water-based memory foam material called Memoform. It's a biodegradable, high-performance foam that does not hold heat, the company says.

"All Magniflex foams are manufactured with open cells for better air circulation," says Henry Burney, U.S. sales director.

Magniflex's Gold Mattress Collection has 22-karat gold fibers woven into the covering. The thread has anti-microbial and anti-static properties that are dust-mite resistant and reduce odors. First used in luxury hotels in Dubai, the mattresses have five zones of memory foam that can be adjusted to suit the user. The retail price for this golden wonder is \$24,000 for a queen size, \$1,000 just for the pillow.

Vivètique, an all organic mattress manufacturer, combines domestic wool and cotton, traditional American craftsmanship and the latest technology.

"We partner with more than 200 ranchers who grow organic wool and cotton," says Steve Carwile, vice-president of the family-run company.

Vivètique sells mattresses with or without innersprings. Their newest, the Ergonomic mattress, allows personal customizing on either side of the mattress.

The foundation is made of individually wrapped innerspring coils and various inner layers of wool and natural latex that can be added or removed depending on preference. Organic wool covers the outside and naturally regulates body temperature by wicking away moisture. Prices start at \$2,900 for twin and range up to \$5,000 for a king, depending on the retailer. Non-innerspring mattresses consist of natural latex and various outer layer choices of organic cotton or wool. Prices start at \$1,435 for a twin.

If you suffer from allergies, natural latex is a great choice because it deters bacteria and dust mites. Organic choices also help the chemically sensitive because many traditional mattresses are sprayed with chemical fire retardants.

One final note: Natural latex, wools and cottons turn to dust in landfills and leave virtually no eco-footprint -- good news for sleepers worried about the Earth.

First published on September 20, 2007 at 10:30 am

Rosa Colucci can be reached at 412-263-3859 or rcolucci@post-gazette.com.