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SHOPPING AROUND

Looking for a Soft Spot to 'Om'

By [ANJALI ATHA VALEY](#)

We're tired of using the germy, flattened and frayed yoga mats offered for rent at our gym. That's one reason we were cheered to find that manufacturers are rolling out a slew of new mats they claim are both environmentally friendly and give a more comfortable surface for doing your downward-facing dog.

The latest mats provide more cushion and are heavy enough that they won't move around while you practice. Indeed, we found that the new products helped keep us from slipping during our practice and provided enough padding to ease the pressure on our joints during certain poses.

Manufacturers are unveiling the new mats at a time when the market for yoga equipment is growing. According to a 2008 survey by Yoga Journal, Americans spend \$5.7 billion a year on yoga classes and products, an 87% increase from 2004.

Here's a look at the latest mats:

Lotuspad Earth Mat

Price: \$38.95

Availability: lotuspanyogamats.com

Comment: Made from thermal plastic elastomer, which the maker says is recyclable and less toxic than the more commonly used PVC -- or polyvinyl chloride -- plastic. The mat was portable enough to carry to class but not so light that it moved around during our practice. The lime green color was also pretty stylish.

Manduka ProLite Mat

Price: \$68

Availability: See manduka.com for a list of retailers.

Comment: This felt a little heavier than the other mats we tried. The mat didn't slip or bunch up while we practiced -- even when we held our "plank" pose (a push-up position). It also nicely cushioned our back and head when we lay on it and did leg exercises in a Pilates class.

Lululemon Athletica Eco Align Ultra Mat

Price: \$54

Availability: See lululemon.com for store locations.

Comment: Made of thermal plastic elastomer. We liked the straight lines printed on the mat, which help you align your feet while doing your warrior poses.

Lululemon Athletica Hot Yogi Mat

Price: \$38

Availability: See lululemon.com for store locations.

Comment: This mat is specifically for hot types of yoga: We tested it in a Bikram class, where the room is about 100 degrees and attendees sweat a fair amount. Unlike other mats we've tried, we were able to lie on this one without sticking to it. We also could hold our poses without slipping. The mat is made from cotton and is machine washable.

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