

WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

BY MELINDA MURPHY

Latex is truly Mother Nature's gift to sleep. Read on to find out why!

Here's a riddle for you: How is a latex mattress like maple syrup? They both come straight from a tree!

Nobody knows this better than CHANTAL TRAVERS, the owner of Willow Mattress. Chantal took her team to visit a rubber plantation in Thailand, the plantation where the organic latex for their Willow mattress line comes from. They all came back sold on latex mattresses more than ever.

"It was a fascinating trip," says VERITY DIBBEN, Chantal's right-hand person. "We took a truck out to the middle of this plantation, a long way from Bangkok. The guy got out of the truck, stripped back the bark, and latex just started seeping out of the tree into a little cup. When the cups were all full, they poured the latex into a tank and sent it off to the factory to be made into a mattress. It's that simple. Latex is the most natural thing you can think of. It's just juice from a tree; plus, harvesting it doesn't hurt the tree at all – they live for decades!"

In other words, in a very similar way you tap a tree for maple syrup, rubber trees are tapped for latex. And make no mistake: memory foam is not latex. Foam is manmade; latex is made by Mother Nature herself.



A little background

Over 99 percent of the world's natural latex is tapped from the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree, which originally came from Brazil. In the early 20th century, the tree was introduced to Southeast Asia, primarily in Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia and China. By the 1920s, latex was known regionally as "white gold". Here in Singapore, approximately 40 percent of the land area in 1935 was occupied by rubber plantations, driven by the demand for rubber tyres. Today, most natural rubber still comes from Southeast Asia where the trees continue to be grown on large rubber plantations.

And you know what? All those rubber trees are actually good for the environment. Chantal explains: "Everybody knows that trees keep our air clean, so all those plantations are doing their part to help the environment. In addition, if the rubber tree plantation wasn't there, its employees would likely be turned over to other industries less friendly to the planet."

They need those employees too, because it takes a lot of rubber trees to make one mattress! For example, to make a queen-size latex mattress, a whole day's output of twelve acres of rubber trees is required. That's a lot of trees working to clean the air while making the farmers money at the same time.

Organic versus natural

Willow Mattress now carries two kinds of latex mattress: natural and organic. What's the difference? Well, to you and me, not all that much. The product you sleep on is pretty much the same either way, providing the same health benefits and comfort; and the latex from the tree goes through the same process at the factory. The difference between natural and organic latex is really in how the trees are grown. As you might suspect, trees on organic plantations aren't treated with pesticides or chemical fertilisers. Because it's a bit harder to grow trees this way, there's a higher price tag associated with organic mattresses. If you buy one, though, you can rest easy knowing that you've done your part for the planet and the organic farmer, too. *el*

Learn more about Willow Mattresses at willowmattress.com.sg.

