Most plastic alternatives tend to change shape with body heat and provide very little support, but there are also niche products such as synthetic whalebone that are able to provide good performances.

Near the end of the 19th century, whalebone became scarcer; among the alternatives tried, the one that proved more popular was spiral steel, with the ability to flex in two directions. Nowadays, most corsets are made with spiral steel and flat steel only near the straight lines near the center.

Since at least the 16th century, whalebone and steel have been added to corsets. In the early 18th century, whale bone was seen as being a sign of status; however, it was later replaced by steel due to its superior support. The whalebone was more flexible and allowed for greater movement, making it a more practical choice for daily wear. However, whalebone and steel corsets have both been associated with the suppression of women's bodies, and therefore still carry a negative connotation. The corset was also a symbol of the power of the monarch, as it was often made of the finest materials and worn by the royal family. Today, corsets are still worn by some women as a fashion statement, but they are also used in historical reenactments and as a way of connecting with the past.