

Recycling in the Garden

Garden recycling is a great way to help the environment while also saving money. The most common type of garden recycling is likely composting, using kitchen scraps, leaves, grass clippings, garden waste, newspaper and other items to create a soil additive used as a fertilizer. However, many of our everyday household items can also serve other purposes in our gardens instead of taking up space in the landfill. Whether you spark your imagination by creating unique garden art from salvaged materials or reuse old objects for practical purposes, there is a place for just about anything in the garden.

There are endless ways to recycle in the garden; here are a few ideas to get you started:

Cereal Boxes

Shred or tear them into pieces and incorporate with your existing mulch. They will break down over time while helping to suppress weeds. If you have problems with grass invading your landscape beds, bury the flat boxes under the mulch along the border of the bed.

Mini Blinds

Old and broken mini blinds have several practical uses in the garden. The plastic blades can be cut with scissors and used as plant tag labels or punch a hole in one end and use as tool tags in the shed. The hard plastic handle (used for adjusting the light) can be used as a plant stake and the soft cord can be used to tie plants up when they get top heavy.

Ketchup Bottles

Use them to water to seed trays and seedlings. They will provide a light amount of water for plants that can't tolerate the water pressure coming from a hose.

Glass Bottles

Colorful wine bottles can be turned into butterfly watering stations. Bury the bottles neck-down and place water in the shallow depression on the bottom. Refill every two or three days.

Milk Jugs

Empty milk jugs can be cut and altered to create garden tools, bird feeders, and plant cloches. Here are just a few ideas...

Cut a hole opposite the handle, put the handle on your belt and you're ready for picking berries.

Milk jugs with the bottoms removed can be used to protect tender young plants from late frosts (shown right). Just be sure to remove them promptly to avoid heat stress.



If you have weeds in your landscaped beds (we all do) but are worried that herbicide sprays will damage your desirable plants, create a shield using a milk jug. Just cut off the bottom and cut a hole in the side of the jug (shown left), and use it to shield your plants when spraying the weeds. You may need to leave the jug in place after spraying until the herbicide dries to avoid contact with nearby plants.



Milk jugs, juice bottles or just about any sealable plastic container can be placed in the bottom of your giant pottery pieces to save potting soil (depending on the plants you put in it). But don't block the drainage holes.

Newspapers, Letters, Envelopes, Junk Mail, Bills

Paper products can be shredded and added to the compost bin or worked into the garden soil. Just remember to remove any plastic attached to envelopes and pay those bills first! If you bury the paper shreds in fall, they will have rotted out by spring. Newspapers can be laid flat in between vegetable garden rows to suppress weeds and also make good pots for starting seeds (shown right). To make a newspaper pot, fold one page in half, wrap it around a plastic water bottle, fold the bottom up the side of the pot and use a small piece of tape to hold it all together. You can place the entire pot in the ground when it's ready for transplanting and the pot will decompose rapidly.



Aquarium Water for Gardens

If you have a fish aquarium consider hauling those buckets of dirty water out to the garden for your plants. Not only will you be recycling the water but you'll be providing your plants with a natural fertilizer.

Composting

Do you ever feel guilty throwing out produce when you clean out the refrigerator? Recycle those wilted vegetables and much more in a compost bin. Other than meats, oils, metals and plastics, you can throw just about anything into a compost bin: rotting fruit and vegetables, egg shells, tea bags, coffee grounds, newspaper, junk mail, dryer lint, dryer sheets, spent annuals, old potting soil, grass clippings, fireplace ashes, old spices, nut shells, old leather watch bands, wallets and gardening gloves, wooden toothpicks, vacuum cleaner bag contents, hair, nail clippings and much more. More information on composting is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep323>.

Banana Peels and Nut Shells

Use banana peels to feed your Staghorn fern. These epiphytic ferns rely on acidic rain water and falling leaf litter to give them nutrients, but banana peels work really well also. Nut shells can be added to mulch beds where they blend in with other brown material, keeping the moisture in and the weeds out. Avoid using peanut shells in the garden if someone in the family has a peanut allergy since there is some debate as to whether this could be a problem.

Cardboard Seed Pots

Cardboard toilet paper and paper towel tubes make pots for planting seeds. Place them in a sturdy tray and leave the bottom open or fold the bottom in. When you are ready to transplant, open the bottom and plant directly into the ground with tube left on.



Cardboard beverage containers with individual cardboard dividers (shown right) and cardboard milk containers with the tops cut off also work well for starting seeds and propagating plants.

Bear-Shaped Honey Bottles

Add interest to a window sill by using a fun-shaped plastic container as a decorative planter for a house plant. Just remember to drill holes in the bottom.



Plastic Take-out

Reuse plastic silverware for markers in the garden and the plastic trays from grocery stores and fast food restaurants as plant saucers. Small containers made of thick plastic (Chinese take-out) also work great as soil scoopers.

Juice Bags & Yogurt Cups

Plant seeds or root cuttings in a window sill until they are ready to be transplanted into the landscape or vegetable garden. Again, remember to poke holes in the bottom so that the plants don't drown.

Spice/Prescription Bottles

Plastic prescription bottles and spice bottles can also be used to store seed collected from your garden. Just be sure to wash and dry them thoroughly before use. The square plastic containers with vent holes (grape tomato containers) can be used to hold and organize packets of purchased seed.

Frugal decor in the garden

Use broken statues, ceramics and nick-nacks in the garden. Just glue the broken pieces back together (or not) and place them in landscape beds or potted plants for added interest in the garden.



Old aluminum kitchen items

Use your imagination and create unique planters from old aluminum and ceramic kitchen items. Things like aluminum ice cube trays and ice buckets, old kettles, tea pots, roasters, tin cans, bundt pans, aluminum jello molds, and more can make attractive planters for house and porch plants.

Coffee Cans

Large, empty coffee cans work great for holding small garden tools such as clippers, plant labels, ties, and string.

Dryer Lint

Add your dryer lint to the compost bin or place a layer at the bottom of a planter or container. It will prevent soil from leaking out the bottom and will hold some moisture also.

Mesh Fruit & Vegetable Bags

Reuse these bags to carry harvested fruit and vegetables from garden to kitchen.



Card Holders and Lawn Care Stakes

Card holders from flower bouquets and lawn care company stakes that alert you of applied pesticides can be reused to create tall plant labels or prop up plants.

Old Greeting Cards & Seed Packets

Create unique plant labels with old flower print greeting cards or, after you have planted all the seed, use the seed packet itself to label those plants. If possible, laminate for durability.

Dishes

Cracked or chipped dishes make for attractive plant saucers and a large shallow ceramic baking dish could be used as a birdbath. A plate that shattered when you dropped it on the floor is on its way to becoming a mosaic pot.

Recycled Materials as Trellises

An old screen door made with a plastic or iron design on the front can be converted into a trellis (shown right). Just tear out the screen and add wire or fishing line across any portion that will not support a climbing vine. Remember to fasten it or prop it up securely so that it doesn't come crashing down in the next storm. Old fencing, metal lamp stands and even umbrella frames also work great for trellising plants.



This old metal lamp stand has been turned into a bean trellis.

Mailboxes

Turn an old mailbox into a birdhouse. Just drill the correct size hole for the bird you want to attract in one end and use the original door to clean it out between residents. You can also use them to store garden tools.



PVC

Cut your leftover 1-2 inch PVC pipe into 3 foot lengths, paint the outside green (or not) and place in flowerbeds for frogs. Frogs will seek shelter in the tube and may help control the insect population in your yard.

Garden Hose

Garden hose have a leak? Instead of buying a new one, just purchase a mending kit and the hose is like new again. You can even save that piece of leaky hose and use it to replace the broken plastic handle on your old buckets. Just place the hose over the broken handle or remove the handle completely before installing. It will make your hand more comfortable the next time you have to carry a heavy load.

Old buckets

Most gardeners keep a bucket around for doing yard chores. But when that bucket gets old, you may be able to reuse it for growing vegetables in a hanging position. As long as it still has a handle and isn't cracked or broken too badly, use a hole saw to cut a medium-sized hole in the bottom of



the bucket (shown left). Have someone hold the bucket right side up while you place a plant (tomatoes work well using this technique) through the hole. Try to drill your hole only big enough to fit your seedling without the whole plug falling through. Add your potting soil so that it fills only about one-quarter of the bucket and hang in a sunny location (shown right). As your plant grows, you can gradually add more potting soil to the bucket.



Curtains & Linens

Find a second home for old sheets and ripped curtains in the garden. Linens can serve as shade cloth to keep lettuce from bolting early. Drape sheets and blankets around emerging perennials when an unexpected frost threatens to nip them back. Use sheer curtains as floating row covers to block chewing insects from your vegetables.

Plastic Storage Bags

If you need something smaller than a collapsible plastic greenhouse, consider making your own using a zippered, plastic storage bag (the ones your sheets and bed spreads come in). Reinforce the bottom using cardboard and place sticks (bamboo works well) in the corners to reinforce the sides. You can use this structure like a mini greenhouse inside or outside. Open the zippered flap when used outside to allow air circulation and release heat. You can also reuse Ziploc bags to start seeds (shown right) or place over a pot of cuttings using a pencil to prop up the bag. This will keep the environment moist and allow plants to root or spout quicker.



Plastic Shopping Bags

Plastic shopping bags can be tied together and used as a trimming tote around the yard. Just tie the ends of several plastic bags together so that you end up with a chain of plastic bags, each end having handles. To use, lay it on the ground and stack small sticks, twigs and other trimmings in the center. When you have all you can carry, wrap the bags around the trimming tightly so you don't lose any and haul them to your composter, landscape beds (use as mulch) or to the roadside for pickup. Another use for plastic shopping bags is to tie them around your knees when working in the garden to protect your pants from grass stains. It may not be fashionable but it will save you money and time treating stained clothes.



Plastic shopping bags can be reused for many things...just be sure to recycle them when you're finished with them.

Pantyhose

Cut strips of worn out pantyhose to fashion plant ties that won't cut into the stems. If you practice space saving gardening techniques by growing vegetables on trellises, you can use larger pieces of pantyhose to cradle heavy produce, like cantaloupes or squash, so they don't pull free from their stems. When applying powdered organic insecticides, like Bt for caterpillars, you can use the foot end of the pantyhose as a shaker.

Garbage Cans

A leaky garbage can could make a good compost bin. Poke extra holes in the can for drainage, and with a sealed lid, it can be rolled on its side to mix the compost. If a plastic garbage can is intact, but harbors an odor that you can't get rid of, turn it into a rain barrel by adding a spigot at the bottom and some screening to the top. For more information on rain barrel construction, visit <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/materials/workbook/reduce-stormwater-runoff.htm>.



Shipping Pallets

Save some old wooden shipping pallets from the landfill by using them to build a compost bin. If you can find the pallets for free, the rest of the hardware will only cost between \$10 and \$15. For directions on how to build a this composter, visit <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu/Horticulture/documents/ShippingPalletComposter.pdf>

Garden Art

One of the most popular ways to garden recycle is by reusing old objects or junk as garden art. Nearly any object has potential for transformation into the garden or elsewhere. With a little creativity, you can turn an otherwise useless item into a one-of-a-kind piece of art. From various metal objects like bed frames, bicycles and gates to aluminum washtubs and tire rims, there is potential for sculptures, trellises, flower containers and other interesting focal points.



These old tires have been painted colorfully, serving as unique planters for some interesting plants, while the bicycle below makes for a one-of-kind piece of artwork.

