

Reusing Stuff In Your Garden

Earth Day isn't just a day in April to frugal gardeners. No matter what month it is, we're always on the look out for ways to tread lightly in our little corner of the world.

Here is a short list of some of the items which many people throw away that I reuse in some way while I am gardening. By no means is this a complete listing, but it is a good starting point to get your creative juices flowing:

Plastic knives: I love these. I've always been a terribly lazy gardener and in the past I never marked the plants and seeds when I've stuck them in the ground. I have this problem no more. With my permanent marker and a handful of plastic knives, I've got plant markers for everything this season.

Old panty hose: I like cutting the legs off these and using them to tie up plants like tomatoes. These are ideal because they stretch a bit so the plants aren't held rigidly to the trellis.

Clear plastic clam shell type containers: I use the clamshell packaging for muffins and such by poking a drainage hole in the bottom, filling with potting soil and planting seeds in these. Once done, close the top down and you have an instant mini greenhouse. If it gets too warm, simply open the lid. When the plants get large enough, you can transplant them to the garden, rinse out the makeshift greenhouse and store it away for next year.

Shower curtains: I use a couple of old shower curtains that have been around for years. They are extremely handy for transplanting mature plants. I hate to get garden soil on my lawn since that usually means small rocks meeting the lawn mower, so I spread the shower curtain out next to the plant that is going to be moved or get divided. All the dirt that gets dug up is piled onto the shower curtain. If I'm going to

move the plant, or perform a bit of surgery on it, a second shower curtain is handy too. I'll use it like a skid to move the plant from place to place, eliminating the need to pick it up at all. Then when I'm done with projects like this, I can pick up the edges and send the dirt directly where I want back into the garden. No dirt on the lawn and the project is finished without having to shovel all the dirt back again.

Old pop cans: I've used these for years in the bottoms of all of my planters and containers. If you fill the bottom third of a container with slightly bent / crushed pop cans, you can use less potting soil when planting. This will give you a lighter pot when finished and costs less per pot. The cans allow space at the bottom of the pot for drainage, so there is need to keep a supply of gravel for this purpose either.

Empty plastic pop bottles: These are wonderful to make a drip water system for hard to water plants. I have a couple areas with plants where the water runs right off if I use the hose or a sprinkler. By leaving the cap on the bottle, and cutting off the bottom, you can create a drip system. It's your choice whether you want to put in the garden on watering day or just leave it behind the plant and out of sight.

I poke a couple holes in the shoulder of the bottle, then bury the top of the bottle along side the plant that needs watering. Fill the bottle and let the water slowly seep out at root level and the water run off problem is solved. Depending on the area in my garden, I've used both the green colored plastic and the clear ones. Chose whichever shows less in relation to the plant and the location.

Broken flower pots: If a pot still has one side that is good, these make cute additions to the garden. Bury the broken part and plant inside the "cave" that is created. These broken pots are a good way to highlight particular plants or to tuck in little bits of tiny ground cover.

Broken garden tools: You can stick the handle end in the ground, leaving the shovel or rake head visible. You can then train a vine up the handle or use the new “stake” to tie up a plant.

As you can see, there are a lot of ways to use various objects that would normally end up in the landfill as part of your garden. We all should make a conscious effort to celebrate Earth Day every month by reusing some of these familiar items in our garden. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle should all be familiar words to a gardener. Other helpful hints can be for the garden can be found at [Homeclick](#).

Free Organic Fertilizer

All set for another article telling you the jobs you should be tackling from your “to do” list this winter?

Well, think again! I’m not going to tell you to clean and sharpen your shovels (although we should all be doing that!), nor am I going to give you a schedule to get your fruit trees pruned and your roses cut back (although those activities need to be done too).

This idea will give you more flowers and produce more veggies while saving you water (which saves you time and money) and save even more time since it should cut down on the weeding too. The best part is it can all be yours for free. No money. Just some time and energy this winter to have a better garden come spring and summer.

A novel or brand new tip? Nope. This tip is as old as the hills. Enrich your soil this winter & you will reap the benefits later.

Animal Waste: I'm lucky enough to have horses and chickens on my property, so I regularly add the bedding materials to my garden areas. If you're not out in farm country, there will still be places to search for this Garden Gold. Drag out the yellow pages, or keep your eyes open as you drive through your community. Watch for businesses that need to dispose of animal waste & then make a contact. Stop in when you see a riding stable & ask if you can pick up a container full of fertilizer. Locate the feed store closest to you and ask if you can post a Wanted notice on a bulletin board. Put an ad on Craigslist and you'll probably be blessed with several contacts.

Wood Chips / Sawdust: Besides animal wastes, you could also be searching out businesses that work with wood for sawdust and wood chips. Both of these make great mulch and will cut down on the need to water as often. Winter is a great time to spend digging up contacts since we can't be out digging in the dirt.

Coffee Grinds: Coffee stands regularly need to dispose of used coffee grounds, and while there is no real proof they provide nutrients to your soil, they do seem to add a non clumping sort of texture to my gardens. Living in Starbucks land as I do (the Pacific NW), coffee grounds are prolific and again – free.

Yard Waste: If you didn't get all your fall leaves picked up, do it now and stick them in black trash bags. Poke some air holes in the bags, close them up and store someplace where they won't freeze. They will start decomposing and be ready to dig into your garden space come spring!

The winter will barely be long enough if you start on this list now. There are so many sources of free items to add to your soil, you might not even have time to sharpen that shovel!

Frugal Pest Control

If you have a garden, then you have garden pests. It seems that bugs of all kinds love our plants just as much as we do. There are a couple things you can do before heading off to your local garden center to purchase products to tackle the problem.

First, you don't necessarily want to kill it. That's right. The pest you kill may be just the one that is keeping other pests from your plants. Be sure you identify what you've found before you decide its' life is over. Either Google your little find or head to your local Extension office to meet with a Master Gardener to find out just what you've got. If it is a beneficial insect, let it alone & it will continue to rid your garden of other little pests, thereby earning its' keep.

If you decide you have pests that need to go, an inexpensive removal technique is to give them strong blasts from the hose periodically. Alternatively, you can find pest control services on a site like [Pest Control Experts](#) if you need professional help. If the hose technique isn't working but you don't need professionals, but you need something else to make your plants seem less like breakfast to the little creepy crawlies, try either of these "recipes" for a natural pest control:

Mix 1 T. dishwashing soap with 1 cup cooking oil. Use 3 T of this to 1 quart of water & spray directly on the plants.

Steep several cloves of garlic (bruised or chopped) with up to a tablespoon of red chili flakes in a quart of water for several days. Spray directly on plants.

Your last resort may be [pest control](#), but try the other tips

first.

Growing Native

Frugal gardeners are always looking for ways to make their yards attractive, while holding costs down. Re-introducing native plantings to your property will do just that.

Native plants are those that were growing in any area before humans introduced plants from distant lands. In my Zone 7 garden located in the Pacific Northwest, they include things like Evergreen trees, salal, maples, columbine, ferns, bleeding heart, Oregon grape, honeysuckle, rhododendrons & huckleberries.

There are many advantages to going native:

- Native plants, once established, can survive the winter's cold and the summer's heat while requiring no watering or fertilizing. This saves on your energy bill as well as cuts the time you need to spend maintaining the garden (thinking on a global scale, if we all did this, the need to produce chemical fertilizers would be curtailed too).
- Native plants tend to stay where you put them. Simple but oh, what a nice trait. They rarely become invasive, unlike some plants we use from other areas. Just think of the time & energy this could be saving?
- Typically, native plants are pest & disease resistant. Starting to see a trend here? There will be no need to purchase products to aim at the crawly things!
- Landscaping with native plants improves the environment by returning the area to a healthy ecosystem. Growing native will do the best job of providing food & shelter

for a wider variety of native wild animals and birds, plus you'll get free entertainment in your own back yard.

To find information on Native Plants for your region or zone, check with local garden clubs, county extension services or the [New England Wildflower Society](#) (US & Canada). They provide extensive lists of resources including each states Native Plant Society contact information, specific plants for all the regions, as well as planting information and activities.

Harvest Your Own Seeds



Since my garden is located in Zone 7, now is the time to start planning ahead for the hundreds of free plants I want to get next spring. If you're just starting out at gardening as a hobby, you may be wondering how does one get free plants? You are also probably wondering that if there are ways to get free plants, is it possible for me do this?

The frugal gardener should be outside searching the plants in

our gardens that are going to seed. These are the very same seeds most people buy at the garden stores in the spring. That's right, the seeds are sitting right in front of us, waiting to be harvested!

If left alone, the seeds will dry and drop around the original plant(s). If you gather the seed & save them over winter, you can start them indoors, in a greenhouse or plant them directly in the garden after the last frost (there is also nothing wrong with letting them seed on their own. It may get a bit crowded, but you can dig up the 'babies' and replant them).

All you need to harvest your own seeds are a few basic supplies and you'll be ready to become a Seed Saver!

- Marker
- Envelopes
- Small paper bags (occasionally a BIG bag, depending on the size of your plants)
- Clippers

Pick a dry day to gather seeds as they will be less likely to mold over winter. Search out the plants that are at the end of their growing season. If you look closely where the flowers were, you should be able to spot some in the next stage – where the plant starts to set its seed for the next season. Pick the best specimen to save the seed from. The more carefully you select the plant, the better quality seedlings you will have come next season.



The best seed savers are both patient and observant – making frequent tours of the garden, looking for plants that are in the process of going to seed (be sure you stop dead heading or you'll never have any blossoms setting seeds). You want them as mature as possible, but you want to catch them before they disperse on their own or before it rains.

To actually gather the seeds, I find I get some of the seeds from a flower or plant, but rarely all of them. Since the plants are dry, that makes the seeds hard to capture. I've tried different methods for different flowers. This includes cutting small seed pods & just putting them whole into an envelope or cutting larger pieces and putting them in paper bags. Often I've slipped the bag over the stem, then bent the stem off and tipped the bag over. The biggest difficulty comes because the stems are dry so as soon as something touches any part of the plant the seeds will scatter. You'll probably have to try a plant a few times before you come up with a good way to get some of the seeds captured from that particular plant.

Allow your seeds to air dry indoors at room temperature as they are laid out on a flat surface. Once dry, you can choose

to clean them up or not. I've done it both ways. If I have time, I clean up my collections and put all the like seeds together in an envelope and seal (being sure to label). If the pieces won't fit easily into the envelope, I clean up my collection, tossing stems and old blossoms, and just use the smallest size paper bag by folding over the top, taping shut and labeling.

Keep the packets of seeds in a cool, dark and dry space over the winter*** The best spot would be a moisture proof container inside your freezer or refrigerator, but I've successfully grown plants from seed that just got stuck in a desk drawer.

Start looking at your plants that look a bit worse for wear and see if you can harvest a few seeds. You can then start dreaming of where you're going to expand your garden next spring or how many people on your gift giving list would enjoy a gift from your yard.

**** Use of Desiccants: To keep seeds dry, you could use the little packets of silica gel that come with new electronics and other items or being frugal, you could make your own. Just take a teaspoon of powdered milk and make a small pouch or envelope out of paper towel. It works just as well to absorb any moisture and keeping your seeds dry.*

Know Your Plant Zones

Average Annual Minimum Temperature

ZONE	Zone	Temperature
1	1	Below -50 F
2a	2a	-50 to -45 F
2b	2b	-45 to -40 F
3a	3a	-40 to -35 F
3b	3b	-35 to -30 F
4a	4a	-30 to -25 F
4b	4b	-25 to -20 F
5a	5a	-20 to -15 F
5b	5b	-15 to -10 F
6a	6a	-10 to -5 F
6b	6b	-5 to 0 F
7a	7a	0 to 5 F
7b	7b	5 to 10 F
8a	8a	10 to 15 F
8b	8b	15 to 20 F
9a	9a	20 to 25 F
9b	9b	25 to 30 F
10a	10a	30 to 35 F
10b	10b	35 to 40 F
11	11	Above 40 F

If you're interested in gardening to any extent at all, you should really know what zone your garden is in. Having this number in mind will help you pick plants for your area that are going to survive over winter. Step number one for a frugal gardener is to stick to plants that will handle the weather where you're live.

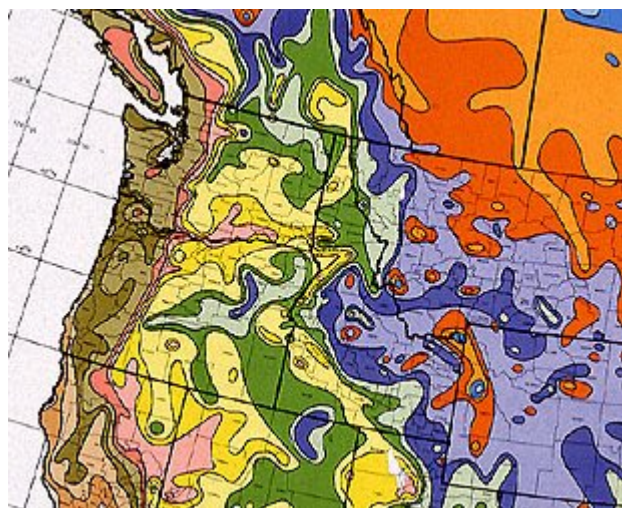
Please understand that there are some difficulties with this Zone idea, especially towards the west coast of the U.S. Due to the air coming in off the Pacific, and the multiple mountain ranges it has to cross, some areas of the west coast states are in the same zone, but experience totally different climates. So, the Zone map is a place to start, not the end all of your own gardens identity.

Once you have the Zone your gardens are classified as, you are better prepared to go to your local nurseries as well as participate in gardening forums on line Often when we as gardeners ask anyone for help, the first thing we hear is "What Zone are you in?"

Zones can tell a gardener all sorts of things including the

amount of rainfall, average temperatures and the earliest and latest frost one can expect for your area. All this info adds up to which plants you can grow year round in your gardens if – and this is a big IF – all the other variables for that plant are met.

Plant Hardiness Northwest



Annuals vs. Perennials

You've decided to add some color to your garden and every store has dozens of the 4 or 6 packs of annuals lined up just like candy bars at grocery check out lines. It is tempting to choose a few petunias, some trailing lobelia and other "color spots" as garden departments like to call them. Your mind sees them filling pots, jazzing up your empty garden beds and perking up your entry area.

Now, stop and think. How many times have you done the same thing? Year after year, planting these temporary flowers, giving a brief display to your yard and making a negative impact on your wallet? Annuals are short lived and most of us

are drawn to them every spring and summer.

The frugal alternative is to search out the perennial offerings, those plants often not looking like the stars of the garden department. Most come in gallon containers or larger and sport price tags many times the amount of the annuals.

Wait a minute. Why would these be the frugal gardener's choice? The basic difference is annuals are going to provide that burst of color once – and a perennial plant comes back each year, or is hardy year round.

If you consider gardening with perennials like putting money into an investment account, you start to get the vision. Besides continuing to add to the beauty and value of your garden, you can divide perennials every couple of years; making them a gardener's equivalent of [a compound interest bearing account!](#)

Now, there is something a frugal gardener can embrace! Think of how many pots you can fill on a permanent basis? Which gardeners on your gift list would love a plant or a pot full of plants? The price of that one perennial keeps going down as you see it multiplying over the years.

Once you understand the differences between annuals and perennials your decision to fill your garden with things like hardy geraniums, ornamental grasses and flowering shrubs will be clear. And, if you're still needing the color burst from a pack of petunias, you can get one and splice them in between the work horses of your garden...the perennials!

Read more:

- [Blue Apron Review](#)
- [Motley Fool](#)

- [Costco Gas Station Hours of Operation](#)
 - [Pewdiepie's Net Worth](#)
 - [Another Blue Apron Review](#)
 - [Motley Fool by Thousandaire](#)
 - [Ways To Make Money on the Side](#)
 - [Johnny Depp Net Worth](#)
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Conserve Water & Save Money

Since it's the middle of summer in my zone 7 garden right now I thought it might be good to review some principles of watering our gardens & trees. If you're paying a monthly water bill, you don't want to waste money and when you do water, you should be getting the most for your money by watering efficiently.

First, for those of you with lawns, there are some rules of thumb to use when trying to keep that grass lush and green during the summer months:

- When watering your lawn, water slow, long and deep. A sprinkler should spread water evenly and slowly. Set out sprinklers in the cooler parts of the day to cut down on evaporation.
- Run off is considered very detrimental to your water use as well as your soil, so watch your sprinkler to see you're not watering the driveway, or sending nutrients from your topsoil down the drain.
- Lawns require an inch of water weekly for best growth, either from rain or irrigation or both. Rather than buy a rain gauge, use a coffee can to measure the amount of water applied.
- It takes about 625 gallons of water to apply an inch to

1,000 square feet of lawn area. After watering, the soil should be saturated approximately 3 to 4 inches.

Caring for Your Gardens While Conserving Water

Watering with a hose and nozzle is not as effective as leaving a hose placed at the base of the tree or shrub. Let the water slowly soak into the soil, watering the root system, rather than the plants. The amount of time this takes will vary, depending on the make up of your soil; if in doubt, use your shovel and dig a small test hole to see how the water is being absorbed in your garden.

By making sure you do a thorough watering of the soil around the plants, you will be watering less, and saving more on your water bill. Each plant or bed should be saturated approximately once every two weeks or less depending on the weather in your area.

Many gardeners use a soaker hose system, so they are able to saturate the soil of an entire garden area without having to continually move the hose from plant to plant.

New plantings will require more frequent watering than established plants. The same type of saturating should be exercised, but once a week may be necessary for new plants.

The use of mulch around your established plantings is an excellent method of conserving water. Gardens which are exposed to the sun and drying winds without cover will dry out rapidly and you will find it difficult to do a good job watering and creating strong healthy root systems.

Use caution when mulching brand new plantings, some mulch products will burn small plants. Simply clear a circle around the plant until it takes hold, then move the mulch in closer to cover the root system, not necessarily up to the base of

the plant.

Some of the more effective materials used for mulching are peat moss, wood chips, straw, salt marsh hay, sawdust, pine needles, hay, leaf mold, compost, dried bark and leaves. You will find you use much less water if you have at least a 2" layer of mulch. Again, digging a test hole in the garden is the only way to really know how your watering and mulching system is doing.

With many communities exercising watering restrictions, it is becoming more apparent we all need to conserve this valuable resource. By combining mulching and smart watering techniques we can each do our part to adhere to local conservation guidelines as well as keep our water bills in check.

Read More:

[The Best Piggy Banks That Can Help Teach Kids Money Management Skills](#)

Cats & Your Garden

One of the things that many gardeners dislike is having cats visit their garden. If you would like to keep cats away from your garden, there are some frugal steps that you can take that can help relieve the situation:

First, remove the poop. I know...icky! If you don't, however, the cats will think the area is theirs & they will just continue using your garden as the litter box. You will need to keep repeating this step until you can convince the cats to use another area.

The next step is to, water, water, water your garden and then

water it again. Cats hate water, and hate wet soil too. One of your kids high powered water guns works well as a deterrent too, but you have to sit & wait for Charming Kitty to visit your garden for this to work.

Another option may be dusting the area with pepper which works for some:

- 2 parts cayenne pepper
- 3 parts dry yellow mustard
- 5 parts white flour

Mix and dust into the areas of your garden that the cat has been digging in. This has to be repeated every couple days and is not effective when raining.

Another step you can take is you can apply blood meal, which acts as a fertilizer for your soil, to your garden and apparently smells nasty to cats.

A more decorative alternative is to fill in areas your cat seems to visit with more plants or some “garden art” – even if it is only temporary until your cat loses interest in the spot. A row of stepping stones into your garden will work too, anything that covers up the bare soil.

If you don't mind the cats visiting, but simply want to keep them away from your garden plants, try leaving an area of your yard for the cats. Keep the soil worked and soft as they just love it like that which is the reason why they are always digging in just planted areas of the garden.

Another alternative to keeping cats to specific areas is to plant some catnip in other areas of your yard where the cats have permission to roam. By making other areas of your yard attractive to the cats, they will likely leave your gardens alone.

If your problem is that cats are climbing in planters to nap

or dig, you can cut a piece of chicken wire & lay over the top of the pot or planter until the plants come up and it becomes too full for the kitty. Remove the wire as the plants begin to come up. The chicken wire trick also works to just lay pieces of it on top of garden soil in areas you know the cats visit.

With persistence, you and your cat can enjoy your garden together and if it's your neighbor's cat, perhaps you can convince it to head back home.

Is Organic Gardening Frugal?

Let's think back to our grandparents' gardens, whether they were full of geraniums or rows of carrots or beans; my guess is all of their gardens were grown organically. I can't remember any of them mixing up chemicals to add to their potted plants or their garden beds...but I do remember huge blossoms and giant veggies. Hmmm, what was their secret?

Only in the last couple of decades have we been pressed to purchase chemicals for our gardens. If we return to gardening practices of old (using natural products as fertilizer and practicing companion planting to ward off bugs and critters), we will be gardening organically. When you get down to basics, the natural way will always save you time and money.

The rules of organic gardening are few and they're quite simple:

- Start with good soil. Invest your money here in this category, enriching your soil every year if possible. Remember, earth worms make the best soil of all & they are FREE. Most county extension offices will do (or send out kits) to evaluate soil samples. This way, you will

know what your particular garden is lacking and just what you need to add to make it healthy.

- Healthy soil makes for healthy plant roots. Roots like aerated soil, full of nutrients and water. Those little worms can accomplish most of this too! Mulching will insure that your plants don't have to compete with weeds for the water, as well as cutting down on the amount of watering you need to do. Mulch can be newsprint, old carpet pieces, straw, grass clippings or shredded tree limbs and plant debris that had been growing on your own property.
- Healthy roots make for healthy plants and healthy plants resist drought, disease & pests, so you won't need to buy sprays, dusts and other chemicals for your garden.

When you look at it from this perspective, the simplicity and lack of needing all the chemical treatments that cost so much makes organic gardening an extremely frugal way to garden.