



Bin there, done that

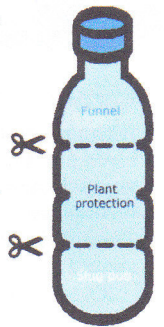
Recycle your rubbish and save money in the garden with these handy tips from **Danielle Lowy**

If you enjoy gardening or growing your own fruit and veg, you'll know that it's not always as cheap as you hoped. What with seeds, trays and pots, labels and caring for growing plants, the expenses can soon mount up. But you don't need to dole money out in the shops for all your gardening needs as you can find many of them close to home: in your dustbin.

How about getting stuff you would normally chuck in the bin to play a part in your gardening? Whether you've got a small yard, a garden or an allotment, there are lots of ways you can use your rubbish in practical and decorative ways in the garden. We've also got some great thrifty garden tips for you to try out this summer.

PUTTING RUBBISH TO WORK

Battle it out with a bottle. Here's a nifty way for one plastic bottle to do several jobs. Carefully cut a plastic bottle into three parts as shown. Sink the bottom part into the ground near a plant that needs protecting from slugs. Add some cheap beer or a mix of yeast, sugar and water. The slugs will be attracted by the yeast but, sadly for them, they can't swim. At least they die happy. Keep a 1cm rim above ground so beneficial insects like beetles don't fall in.



The middle section plays a bonus two roles, acting as a protective barrier for young plants against nibbling slugs, and keeping marauding cats and squirrels from trampling your delicate plants. Simply place this central tube of plastic around the plant. It can be removed when the plants are larger and stronger. Cut in some serrated edges at the top to make it doubly difficult for slugs to climb over.

To make a handy funnel or watering guide, discard the lid and insert this top part upside-down in the soil, near the plant's roots. Watering through this funnel helps direct the water to the roots and is especially useful for large rambling plants like pumpkin or courgette where you can lose sight of where the roots are. You'll be doing your bit for water conservation too as all the water goes straight to the roots, where it's needed most.

SOWING SEEDS

Do you get fed up with the amount of plastic that comes with your weekly food shop? You probably know that the plastic boxes that hold vegetables like mushrooms or soft fruits cannot be put in the recycling bin. Never mind – you can re-use them instead. Thrifty-minded gardeners use these plastic containers to sow seeds (snip a few holes in the bottom) and as drip trays or saucers for plants. The clear boxes with lids (for strawberries and the like) will help seeds to germinate by retaining heat and moisture – your own free mini greenhouse.

Or how about sowing individual seeds in toilet roll tubes, egg boxes or newspaper cylinders filled up with compost? When the young plant is ready you can plant it – home-made pot and all – directly in the soil outside.



How about sowing individual seeds in toilet roll tubes, egg boxes or newspaper cylinders?

ASSORTED RUBBISH ROLES

If you're an allotment holder having trouble with birds picking at your cabbages or other plants, make yourself some little CD bird scarers. Tie some string through an old CD and hang it from a cane or stick. The shining reflection and waving in the wind should send the birds packing.

It's easy to forget where you've sown seeds or the name of a plant, so labelling comes in very handy. But don't fork out on expensive markers – slice up an old laundry liquid bottle into strips and write the plants' names on with an indelible pen.

Using pieces of polystyrene from packaging as crocks in the bottom of large pots helps keep their weight down, improves drainage and minimises your use of compost.

GETTING DECORATIVE

Using rubbish in the garden doesn't just need to focus on the practical side. Why not get decorative too? How about some wacky planters (pictured right)? You can actually use any kind of container as a plant pot so long as it has some drainage. Here are some ideas to try: an old tin kettle, with holes drilled in the bottom; a wellington boot, with holes cut or drilled; an old basin, where the plug hole provides drainage; an old football, with the top sliced off and some drainage holes snipped in the bottom.

Fill your chosen pot with flowers like marigolds or petunias or, for something quick and easy, plant up some supermarket-bought pots of basil, mint or chives.

Going to the beach this summer? Pick up some shells such as limpets to glue on sticks or canes to create a different look in your garden. These can double as stakes for plants that need support, with the bonus function of protection from being poked in the eye.

SEEDS AND WEEDS

As well as recycling rubbish in the garden, there are many other ways to keep your costs down. Maybe you're already composting your kitchen and garden waste. How about an easy way to make green and black-fly repellent harmful neither to you nor the

environment? Boil four cloves of garlic, squish through a tea strainer into a plastic spray bottle and add two cups of water. Sprayed on plants such as broad beans or nasturtiums, the smell will put the greenfly off.

At the end of the summer, collect seeds from flowers or vegetables you have grown. It's easy to shake a poppy head or love-in-the-mist into a paper bag. Some seed heads need to be broken off and separated by hand, such as cosmos or calendula. Wait until the seed head is dry and falls apart easily in your hand. For sweet peas and beans, leave a few pods on the plant to dry out before removing them. Peppers and chilli seeds are some of the easiest to extract. Make sure your seeds are dry – don't put them in the oven as it will kill them – before storing them in marked envelopes in an airtight container to use next season.

Driven crazy by weeds? Get your own back by eating them. You may already have tried nettles in soups or as a tea. Many other garden weeds are worth investigating for their taste and vitamin content. Ground elder – a terribly rampant weed – was actually introduced by the Romans as a delicacy. It's pretty tasty cooked like cabbage or spinach. Or put some hairy bittercress in your salad, make jelly from elderberries or throw wild garlic in your stir-fry. ■

For more information see www.rubbishrevamped.org.uk, www.realseeds.co.uk/seedsavinginfo.html, www.eatweeds.co.uk.

