



IDEAS FOR GARDENING WITHOUT PLASTIC

Gardening is meant to be joyful and bring us closer to nature. With planning and the willingness to learn, it is possible to avoid single-use plastic and highly chemical materials. It may take more time and cost more than shopping for inexpensive products and plants from the big garden stores, but in the long term, it pays to buy better quality tools and materials and to learn the time-honoured ways of gardening that protect wildlife, soil and water. Don't throw away anything that you already have that is made from plastic – use it for as long as possible and then recycle it. The trick is to not buy any new plastic and avoid plastic packaging.

Baskets, boxes, sacks and trugs: Instead of plastic buckets to collect weed, use a woven willow basket or a hessian sack, cardboard boxes or your wheelbarrow. Use wooden veggie boxes for storing fruit, paper sacks to store potatoes. Use a traditional trug for collecting fruit, veg and flowers from your garden.

Cold frames: Make a cold frame from recycled materials such as a reclaimed window for example, to grow seeds and tender plants or to protect lettuces from slugs

Compost: Avoid compost bagged in plastic bags. Build a simple compost box from used wooden pallets instead of buying a plastic composting bin. Add free horse manure, kitchen scraps, ash from your log fire, grass cuttings etc. Keep a separate pile for leaf mulch.

Fertiliser & pest control: Spread free well-rotted manure or compost on your beds. There are many methods of making your own fertiliser. The same goes for pest control – explore natural methods like companion planting for example, before you reach for the poison in a bottle.

Fleece: Instead of synthetic fleece use traditional clothes or old sheets

Flowers: Grow your own cut flowers and let them self-seed. Calendular makes a good companion plant to keep insects away from vegetables and you get beautiful flowers for inside the house too. Growing flowers and making your own posies means so much more than the showy, scentless flowers offered at supermarkets which are likely to have been imported. When filling patio pots, consider using perennials and grasses etc. instead of buying annuals.

Gloves: Use fabric, leather or suede gloves rather than rubberized ones. Leather gloves can dry rock hard if they get wet or muddy but can be massaged back into suppleness.

Herbs: Take cuttings from friends or sow from seed. Grow herbs for making teas, such as mint, chamomile, lemon balm, sage, thyme, yarrow, verbena (dry in bunches for winter months).

Mulching and suppressing weed: Choose natural mulch such as bark which you can get loose from a building merchants or use cardboard (remove any plastic tape) or old woolen carpet to suppress weeds on new beds.

Plant labels: Use wooden plant labels and write on them in pencil so you can reuse them. I reuse old bamboo toothbrush handles for this purpose.

Plants: The most environmentally friendly way to get plants must surely be to grow from seed, take cuttings or split plants - ask friends if they have any big plants that need splitting and share the love! Choose your type of plants with the wildlife in your garden in mind – indigenous plants are important

for bees, butterflies and insects. In the autumn, leave seed pods and foliage on the plants for food and shelter for birds and other garden animals. Buy vegetable plants at your local market.

Pots: If you are buying plants in plastic pots at a garden centre, make sure that they will let you return the pots for recycling or reuse. The big garden centre in Burford has recycling bins for plastic pots and trays in the car park which all garden centres could do if we demanded it. Plastic plant pots can be recycled but most councils will not take them. You could take a box and some newspaper with you next time you buy plants from a nursery and leave the pots there. I have seen a new type of plastic-free, coconut fibre plant pot for a range of herbs. As exciting as this may be, it is worth growing your own herbs outside and or in the house on a window sill.

Seed pots: Make simple seed pots from old newspaper. These can be put straight into the soil when the seedlings are ready to be planted on. Watch how here: <https://vimeo.com/305192150>. Some people use egg cartons to grow seeds on their window sills.

Seeds: Let your vegetables and cut flowers go to seed and collect them instead of buying seed. Check for information on this as not all varieties of vegetables make viable seeds. I let my runner beans go to seed at the end of harvest and use the seeds for next year's crop. Check if there is a seed exchange locally. Our town has a seed potato day and a seed exchange at the local farmers market. If you don't want to grow your vegetables from seed, buy young plants at the farmers market. The WI often sells vegetable and flower seedlings to raise money. This year I got my vegetable plants from a neighbour, who also supplies us with eggs, in exchange for a donation to her chosen charity.

Strimming: Learn how to use the scythe instead of an electric strimmer – for the extra keen natural gardener only! I use a small sickle bought at a jumble sale for cutting underneath bushes and hedges.

String/tie-backs: Use traditional jute string or natural raffia for tying back plants. I collect all strings and rubber bands that come into my possession and often these come in handy for gardening.

Tools: Choose wooden handled tools –buy secondhand if possible. Flee markets are superb for finding well-made tools and you can also try gumtree and freecycle groups online. There are brands that use wood and metal only, even for secateurs. Look after your tools, wipe them with an oily rag before putting them away and sharpen secateurs and hedge cutters as needed.

Top soil, sand: If you need a good amount of top soil, sand, gravel etc. buy it loose from a building and gardening supplier and get them to deliver it to you. Or if you have a friend with a truck, go get it straight from the shop.

Watering cans, buckets and wheelbarrows: choose metal ones or buy secondhand if possible

Watering hose accessories: Choose brass fittings and metal reels for tidying up your hose. They last much longer and are much nicer to use. Offers abound on the internet and at good nurseries.

Weed control: there are recipes for making your own weed killer but perhaps accept a certain amount of weed and pick the rest by hand or hoe it regularly.

- Friends of the Earth gardening tips: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/plastics/plasticfree-green-gardening-tips-tvs-aly-fowler>
- Plastic-free plant mail order: <https://www.bluebellcottage.co.uk/nursery>
Plants in peat-free compost managed without chemical pesticides or neonicotinoid pesticides
- Video on how to regrow everything from scraps: <https://youtu.be/Jze8utzpLhg>
- How to grow herbs on your windowsill:
<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/gardening/a20705923/indoor-herb-garden/>



