

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Seeing Through Green Eyes: Remodeling Green on the Cheap

Dear EcoGirl: I want to know about green remodeling that isn't for millionaires. *Signed, Strapped in San Luis Obispo*

Dear Strapped: How wonderful that you want to remodel ecologically. **The good news is that it doesn't have to cost more!**

Certainly, it can sometimes seem that it does, as our culture's consumer-oriented media too often equates green with buying new products, which can be more expensive. And, yes, if you're going to buy a new item, look for a green option. (Avoid hype by asking what exactly makes the item green.)

However, if your goal is to be earth-friendly and lessen your impact on the planet, and especially if you want to save money, **first consider how to avoid buying a new product at all.** Instead, follow the eco-mantra — **"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle."** Then, what you do to be green can also save you money!

Because, while new eco-goods are helpful, we won't stop our harm to the earth if we keep consuming at our current rate, even if all the materials are labeled "green."

So ask yourself, "What's my goal with this project? Can I use what I have, just in a different way? Can I repair, refurbish, or repaint to refresh the look and match my new design? Is there an opportunity here for creative expression?" I did this recently with an old porch table, repainting it in an artistic way that delights me every time I see it.

If you do decide to buy any items, look first at other people's discards. This saves you money, avoids the earth impacts of producing and shipping new products, and reduces waste in our overflowing landfills. You can also often find unique pieces that bring style into your home — and meet interesting people along the way.

For instance, a while back I got a be-draggled old chair for \$5. It didn't look like much, but I saw good lines and knew that some (non-toxic) stain and a new seat cloth would make it look amazing, which it does. It would've cost me a lot more at an antique store to get something with this great classic design. Plus, it's fun seeing what a little creativity can do. (I hung a small framed picture of the chair's original condition next to it, just for fun.)

Here are some local places where you can find "previously owned" remodeling goodies. (Note: All area codes are 805.)

• **ReStore.** At Habitat for Humanity's ReStore locations, you can get surplus and salvaged building materials at serious discounts. Plus, profits help fund Habitat's construction of homes for low-income families. For more information, see:

- San Luis Obispo County <www.hfhsloco.org/restore.html> 546-8699, 434-0486

- Ventura County <www.habitaventura.org/restore-donate.html> 981-2268

- North Santa Barbara County <www.nsbhabitat.com/restore.html> 928-5399

Note: The South Santa Barbara County chapter holds periodic parking lot sales and plans to open a store in the future. <www.sbhabitat.org/restore.php> 692-2226

• **CalMAX.** Search the free website of California Materials Exchange <www.ciwmb.ca.gov/calmax> to find (and rescue) items that would otherwise go into the landfill. You get things for little or no cost, and the previous owners save tipping fees. Ventura County also has an exchange at <www.vcmx.org>.

• **Community websites.** Look for both individual items and garage sales on websites such as <www.craigslist.com> and <www.freecycle.org>.

Or post a request and see what emerges from someone's attic!

• **Thrift stores and classifieds.** You can also find treasures at area thrift stores. Look in your Yellow Pages or search online for "thrift stores" plus your county name. Also check the classified ads in your local newspapers and their websites.

And, when you're done with your project, remember to "pass it forward" by discarding of your waste wisely. For information and drop-off options, contact the waste management folks in your area: San Luis Obispo County (<www.iwma.com> 782-8530), Ventura County (<www.wasteless.org> 658-4321), and Santa Barbara County (<www.lessismore.org> 882-3600). Some cities (such as Santa Barbara) also have helpful resources.

For more green building information and resources, see <www.BuildItGreen.Org>. This site includes a wonderful page outlining what qualities you might look for in a green product. (Look under "About Green Building" for "What Makes a Green Product?") You can also get more ideas for aligning your home with nature from *Natural Remodeling* by Venolia and Lerner.

So, yes, **it is indeed true that being cheap can actually be good for the planet** — when you look at your project through green eyes!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. You can view previous columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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