

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 Santa Rosa*

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

Sometimes it can seem that it does, as the consumer-oriented media too often equates green with buying green products, which can be more expensive. And, yes, if you're going to buy a new product, look for an ecological one. (Avoid hype by asking what exactly makes the product green.)

But 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 lower your costs! Because, while new eco-products are helpful, we won't stop our harm to the earth if we keep consuming at our current rate, even if all the products 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 an item, look first at other people's discards. This saves you money, avoids the eco-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 —while meeting interesting people along the way! Here are some great local places to find “previously owned” remodeling goodies.

- **Recycletown** (795-3660). Located at the dump (between Rohnert Park and Petaluma), Recycletown has doors, windows, tiles, chairs, lamps, gardening pots, bikes, exercise equipment, household items, and more, all at great prices. Go at least once to have a sense of what's there.

I recently got a great chair there 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 its 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.)

- **ReStore** (568-3228). In Santa Rosa, Habitat for Humanity's ReStore offers surplus and salvaged building materials at significant discounts. Profits support their affordable housing work.

- **Sonomax** <www.SonoMax.org>. Few folks know about this great resource, where businesses offer free and cheap items in order to avoid disposal fees. Recent listings include windows, window coverings, red bricks, carpet, drywall, sinks, doors, insulation, appliances, red lava rock, paint, redwood, and compost.

- **Public websites.** Look for items and garage sales at <www.waccobb.net>, <www.craigslist.com>, and <www.pressdemocrat.com>. Or post a request and see what emerges from someone's attic!

- **Newspaper classifieds and thrift stores** (see the Yellow Pages).

For more places to explore, plus information about recycling your own discards, see your phone book's Recycling Guide (in the Yellow Pages under “R”). Look by category, for instance under Building Materials.

You can also get more green building information and local resources at <www.BuildItGreen.Org>. This site has 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?”)

So, yes, **the good news is 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 Guide to Sonoma, Napa, & Mendocino Counties, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter.

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