

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



## Let's Play The Reuse Game!

OK, today dear readers I'm going to tell you about a fun new activity I've developed that I call "The Reuse Game."

To start playing it, just identify some items that you're ready to discard, then consider how you or someone else could still use them. For each item you reuse, you score a Good Karma point on Gaia's Scoreboard, one of the most satisfying places I know to gather credit.

You can also invite others to play with you, just by asking them for ideas. How lovely for all of us to get rewarded for treating the earth's gifts with respect!

### Why Reuse Matters

Too often, people believe that being ecological means just recycling and buying new "green" products. But, while these actions are helpful, they're not enough. That's because every product we buy causes some eco-harm, including polluting our air and water, poisoning our fish and food, hurting nature's creatures, and generating lots of trash. Green products just do less of this.

Therefore, steering our culture towards eco-sanity requires that we also reduce the *quantity* of products that we use. To help us do this, we can follow the simple mantra, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." Thus we first need to seek to **Reduce** how much we buy and **Reuse** (fully use) each item *before* we **Recycle**.

### How to Earn Game Points

So, to get you started, here are some easy ways that you can earn points in The Reuse Game.

**1) Make damaged items usable again.** For instance, you can:

- **Fix it.** The dial of my space heater recently broke and I wondered if I should trash it. But then I saw a phone number on it, called it, and for just a few bucks got a new dial. Often it's

that simple to get something working again!

- **Adapt it.** When the on/off knob of my living room lamp became flaky, I realized that every night I was turning on several lights by hand. So I got a plug strip to easily turn them on all at once.

- **Update it.** Instead of buying a new table, you might refinish or repaint your current one. You can also turn jeans into shorts, a chipped plate into an art piece, or old shirts into rags.

Once I had a classic wood spice rack that was too bedraggled for a thrift store to want. But I refinished it (which I enjoyed) and sold it at my yard sale to a young couple who loved it. It made me so happy to see it beautiful again, appreciated, and going to a new home.

**2) Before recycling something, consider if someone else can use it.** For instance, unwanted **computers** aren't allowed in the trash so folks often drop these at e-waste events. However, these programs usually just *recycle* items. While this keeps toxics out of landfills and recovers some raw materials, it loses much of the investment in creating the computer.

Thus I encourage you to first look for places that can *reuse* your tech, such as local schools or Santa Rosa's CRC, which repairs, resells, and donates such equipment, [www.CRC.org](http://www.CRC.org).

**3) Get to know the various places where you can sell and donate used items**, including Craig's List, consignment stores, and thrift stores. (See more about this at [www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl2a.html](http://www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl2a.html).)

**4) Be creative in offering your items for reuse.** At the moment when something is headed for the trash or recycling, The Reuse Game is just getting started! Here are some of my successful reuse ideas, to spark your creativity.

- **Magazines, newspapers, and books.** I drop these at my gym, laun-

dromat, and doctors' offices, for others to read.

- **Tincture bottles.** I wash and sell these at my yard sales, where they're found by folks making herbal formulas.

- **Medical supplies.** These can be expensive but hard to offer for reuse. However my local senior center was delighted to put them out for their visitors to take.

- **Plastic shopping bags.** A local thrift store was thrilled to have my extras.

I also put oddball items on my **yard sale "free" table**, and have been so happy to see people make use of them. This includes a woman who took a **cardboard protein powder container** to send cookies to her son, and another person happy to get **little bottles of hotel shampoo**.

**5) Complete the loop by buying other people's used items.** You can often get a good deal on something unique while connecting with other local folks.

**I hope that these ideas get you excited about playing this game.** You'll be amazed at how many great options exist! You might also want to set aside a spot in your garage for items awaiting new homes. For more tips and resources, see [www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl5f.html](http://www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl5f.html).

*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](mailto:EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info) for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.*

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