

# 11 More Ways To Go Green With Your Kids



by Kate Harold

You already recycle your cans, bottles and paper. You use reusable grocery bags. You print on both sides of your computer paper. Is there more your family can do to help preserve our environment for future generations? Absolutely. And in the three R's of waste management, "reduce, reuse, recycle," start focusing on "reuse."

"Reusing products where possible instills a sense of responsibility in children early on. It's a great way to teach environmental, financial and personal responsibility," says Antje Kingma, a local mom and owner of Eco-Bella, Atlanta's kid-friendly eco-store in Virginia-Highland. The shop carries products that promote green living, such as wooden toys made from recycled wood and responsibly harvested wood, clothing made from recycled materials, and cards and journals made with recycled papers and birch wood. "One of the wonderful things about children is their openness to learning. If we can instill values such as reduce, reuse and recycle at an early age, they will become part of their core value system. The younger you start, the more positive change you can bring about," says Kingma.

In this month when we celebrate Earth Day, take advantage of these easy ways you can reuse common around-the-house items, and help your children learn the value of being kind to the planet.

**1 Put together a creativity kit.** Begin taking a closer look at whatever you throw in the garbage. Start saving odds and ends that can be used to craft something original: corks, lids, ribbons, sock hangers, marker caps and so on. When you have a decent collection, pull it out along with some glue and tape. Host an invention hour and have your kids use their imaginations to create something new from something old. Don't forget to make this a teachable moment, and talk about your reusing efforts as your kids are working.

**2 Make toy groceries from real groceries.** Toy food is a big hit with kids. But those little toy boxes of cake mix and taco shells get stepped on even faster than your kid can sneak a cookie. Forget buying more. Use stuff from your own pantry and fridge instead. Keep an eye out for grocery items that can go in the kids' toy grocery cart when you're finished with them. Jell-O and pudding boxes, as well as cleaned-out cream cheese tubs, mustard bottles and chocolate syrup containers, can all have a second life in the playroom.

**3 Create instant art projects.** Before tossing scrap paper and food boxes into the recycle bin, take a quick minute to cut some odd shapes out of them. Think tissue boxes, cracker and cereal boxes, colored office paper, and tissue and wrapping paper. Stash the pieces in an envelope and pull them out when you're ready to get artsy with your kids. Use them for a wide assortment of art projects, including: posters, murals or mosaics; gluing and stapling projects; or shape and color identification.

**4 Renovate a shoebox.** Turn your old shoeboxes into treasure boxes. Help your child decorate the sides and top with clippings from magazines, and create a special place to store trinkets and small toys (the ones you secretly want to toss!). Or cut a slit in the side and turn it into a mailbox. Save empty envelopes from junk mail and turn them into letters to your child. Tuck sweet notes inside such as, "I love your laugh," and enjoy an afternoon of playing post office with your little one.

**5 Find a new home for gift bags.** It's great to reuse gift bags, but you may have more than you can ever imagine going through. Contact a local mom's club, multiples group or pregnancy center. These organizations often use gift bags when congratulating new parents. When they've been reused one too many times, cut them up and use them for art projects as described in No. 3 above.

**6 Set up a stylish storage spot.** Use old paint cans to create fun cubbies for your child's room. Once they're empty and the paint is dried, spray paint the cans a solid color both inside and out. Hang them on a wall by drilling screws through the bottoms of the cans. Use them to store anything from hair bows and ribbons to small stuffed animals.

## Give Trash an Everlasting Life

It doesn't have to stop there. Here are five more common household items you can keep out of the landfill for a little while longer by giving them a second life.

**7 Reusable:** Empty toilet paper rolls; **Second Life:** Holders for electrical cords

**8 Reusable:** Last year's calendar; **Second Life:** Fun, funky wrapping paper

**9 Reusable:** Baby food jars; **Second Life:** Storage containers for tempera paints or small items

**10 Reusable:** Shampoo and soap bottles; **Second Life:** Bath and pool toys

**11 Reusable:** Oatmeal and breadcrumb containers' **Second Life:** Gift containers (decorated with scrap paper)



## Why Reuse?

There's no bottomless garbage can on our planet. All of our trash has to go somewhere. Share these statistics with your kids to show them what kind of an impact we have on the world around us in our everyday actions. According to the EPA, in 2007 (the last year for which data is available)...

■ In the United States alone, we produced about 254 million tons of trash.

■ We generated 4.6 pounds of trash per person per day, up from 2.7 pounds per person per day in 1960.

■ Paper and paperboard made up the largest portion of trash we tossed out (33 percent). □

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