

GREEN SCENE ACT GROOVY

ADD THIS



## ADVENTURES IN ECO-PARENTING

LEAH KLEIN MAKES GOING GREEN CHILD'S PLAY

### LOVE ME SOME UPCYCLING

"If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with."

Remember when you used to cut your jeans and turn them into cutoffs—those jean shorts with a bit of frayed denim at the bottom? Then there was the re-styling of your old—or new—T-shirts. No more crew neck—you'd cut it out for an '80s-style ballet neckline. And forget about a new pair of Keds—once yours got dirty, you'd wash them and they were as good as new. Mostly, we did these things because we thought it was the cool thing to do and sometimes because we had used up all of our babysitting money and had to get creative to keep up with the trends. Either way, I doubt we were thinking about how "green" it was.

Nowadays, the reduce-reuse-recycle way of life is second nature to most of us, especially once we became parents. So since green is the word and we're in a recession, let's talk about the wonders of upcycling: a fun, creative and wallet-friendly practice that's definitely an important part of the eco-friendly lifestyle. Whether you are good with fabric and a pair of scissors, handy with a saw and a hammer, or not handy at all, you can do your part when it comes to upcycling, aka crafting with a cause.

And here's where the opening CSNY quote comes in: Why buy something new when you can transform something old? Craftiness not in your vocabulary? There are some great artisans, crafters and companies that can do the work for you—without blowing your budget.

### IN THE KITCHEN

#### Make It

Jars and bottles come in all shapes and sizes. We tend to buy them, use the contents and then recycle them. Consider saving and reusing your jars and bottles. Bottles, especially small vinegar and oil bottles, make great little vases. Mustard and baby food jars are great to keep for salad dressing. Just add one part vinegar and two parts oil, a little mustard if you like, salt and pepper, and some herbs, then shake it up.

You can take your jars out of the kitchen, too. Melt down some wax and make your own travel candle or kitchen candle. Use jars in the workshop or garage to hold small nails or parts like the different tips for the bicycle/air pump.

#### Buy It

You can buy these great [jar tops](#) that will turn any jar into a pitcher, a powdered sugar shaker, and oil and vinegar cruets.

These fun and funky [scouring pads](#) and sponges are made from corn cobs and peach pits, among other things. They take a little getting used to, but the spaghetti scrub is designed to help clean the dishes with little or no detergent.

Lilypad Baby makes great little napkin sets for at home or your child's lunch box. Lilypad Baby makes [LunchMates](#) out of fabric that would otherwise be thrown out. Their fabric manufacturer uses sample header cards to display their fabric choices. At the end of each fabric run, they send the display cards to Lilypad Baby and they are transformed into these cute double-sided fabric napkins.

[Sublime's coolers](#) are great for when you want to leave your kitchen and keep things cool on the road. They are made from post-consumer high-density recycled PET and the liner is PVC-free and lead-free. These bags are sturdy and come in a great variety of sizes, from the lunch tote, which keeps nine bottles out of a landfill, to the 54-can featherweight, which keeps 50 bottles out of landfills.

As the old saying goes, "The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach." There is a lot of love in our kitchen, but it's coming straight up from our feet. The folks at Sublime sent us a mat to test, and although I am not sure how well it will survive in the long run, so far it is one of the hottest spots in the kitchen. Sublime's [All Purpose Comfort Mats](#) are free of phthalates and harmful heavy metal substances and pass both U.S. and European testing standards—including children's toy standards for the children's play mats. The environment is a consideration both in the production stage, with the elimination of the typical toxic emissions during production, and in the disposal stage, with the elimination of concerns of having toxic heavy metal stabilizers leaching into groundwater and the elimination of pollution of gases if the products are incinerated.



### IN THE PLAYROOM

#### Store It

Remember CDs? Okay, maybe we are not at that point yet, but most of us have an iTunes account and are fairly good at downloading MP3s or listening to Pandora on the computer. Because we've uploaded our music onto our computers, we don't really need that old shelf or cupboard to store our CDs. Whether you have one with drawers or an open CD cabinet, they make the perfect toy for the kids. The one with drawers is great for keeping little trinkets and toys. Each child can have a drawer to keep little rocks and acorns or miniature toys. Periodically sort through the drawers and donate what they no longer need or want.

#### Doll It

The open CD shelves and even old bookcases can be used to make a dollhouse. If your children are old enough, they can work with you to design rugs, paint the "rooms" (each compartment) and add furniture. Check out local thrift stores or [www.freecycle.org](#) for little people and furniture for the dollhouse. You can even use wallpaper and rug remnants for full effect.

#### Project It

In the art corner, you can use pizza boxes, can tabs, bottle tops and all kinds of recyclables for art projects—even puzzle pieces and game pieces from sets that are now incomplete.

### IN THE CLOSET

#### Tee It

Expand your re-styling repertoire from *Flashdance*-inspired tees and cutoffs. From yoga bags made from old jean legs to clothes and

housewares made from T-shirts, your old stuff can be repurposed to continue to fit you in cool new ways. Generation T has some funky clothes, but what I liked even more were the housewares and gifts that they made from old T-shirts. [Generation T: Beyond Fashion—120 New Ways to Transform a T-shirt](#) and [108 Ways to Transform a T-shirt](#) are clever books filled with ideas for reinventing your T-shirts.

Stay Vocal's slogan, "Reuse apparel because you can't recycle the planet," is a great one. When I asked to see what their shirts are like, a few days later I received a Kashi cereal box, reused, nicely taped shut, holding my Stay Vocal shirt. Usually tees from a business that shuts down or a band that breaks up would be shredded into rags or sometimes even burned. Stay Vocal works with companies to acquire as many of the garments as they can before they are destroyed to make their unique, vocal T-shirts.

#### IN THE YARD

##### Auto It

[Tire planters](#) are fun and unique vessels in a garden. I don't recommend them for growing edibles, though.

Hubcaps, paint cans, transit tokens and keys get a new life as bird feeders and birdhouses. Use them as inspiration to make your own or tell someone you love them with an upcycled birdhouse. Check out the hot stuff from [Starling Ink](#), brought to you by Chris, a former Matchbox toy car designer, and her husband, Scott, who have been building things together for 15 years. They have a passion for all things vintage and seem to love car parts.

##### Dump It

For some less fortunate that most of us—as in way less fortunate—their yard is an urban dump. [XSProject](#) works with urban trash pickers throughout Southeast Asia to collect non-recyclable plastic packaging and transform it into new products. This provides the trash pickers with some much-needed income and at the same time reduces the amount of plastic packaging trashing the earth. The XSProject Foundation uses design and education to protect the environment and reduce poverty.

#### ON THE GO

##### Bag It

Paper or plastic? Or paper that was plastic? Or how about bags that were billboards? It used to be that eco-friendly bags screamed green—as in crunchy—and that is not always what we're looking for in a bag.

The [Ecogear](#) Earth Series products are made with nontoxic dyes and recycled PET bottles, but come in a fun bright pink and a more practical charcoal. Sometimes "eco-friendly" means you're expected to take a whole lot of green out of your wallet, but at \$29, these bags are eco-friendly and wallet-friendly.

The [DadGear Billboard](#) Series Messenger Bag is a perfect diaper bag for mom or dad. The design is exceptional, with easy-access wipes and bottle pockets on both sides that can be reached inside or out. The reused billboards make a stylish statement on the front of each bag, making them unique and eco-friendly.

#### QUICK TIPS

If you have something you're thinking of bringing to the curb for trash day, whether it's the pickle jar or that old bookshelf you made in college, then don't! Before you get rid of it:

- Think about upcycling it. Go online and search for ideas. There are tons of great ways to repurpose almost anything.
- Offer it to others via [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org).
- Check in with a local school to see if they want it for an upcoming project.

#### FOR VALENTINE'S DAY, BIRTHDAYS, HOLIDAYS OR JUST BECAUSE

Etsy has a group of [eco-friendly artisans](#). Even eBay has a section for [eco-friendly and fair-trade sourced items](#). (Note: Be sure to read about and ask questions about sources and materials.)

Here are some folks making incredible stuff out of something old, something borrowed and some things blue—but almost nothing new.

[Typewriter jewelry](#)

[Bicycle chain frame with your favorite photo of mom and her cycling team](#)

[Purses and bags from upcycled sweaters and more](#)

[For eco-friendly inspiration](#)

[Gorgeous works of recycled and upcycled art by Tamar Mogendorff](#)

[Church bulletin earrings and other fun works by artist Karen Lucci](#)

[Wine crate pet accessories](#)

*Leah Klein is the Boston Food Mom at [Examiner.com](#). She loves to keep the house nice and cool and wear cozy sweaters in the winter. No matter how much her parents nag, she insists on walking around barefoot four seasons a year. Making bread and cookies are a favorite snowy-day activity, and hot chocolate cures all cold noses in her household.*

