

Remodel by Recycling

Tossing away unwanted items doesn't make economic or environmental sense these days. Recycling saves the environment, while repairing and reusing old or outdated items gives the wallet a break. With a little consideration, it's clear there are new uses for almost every old product -- from prescription bottles to furniture.



According to the Kaiser Family Foundation website, statehealthfacts.org, more than 3.4 billion prescriptions were filled in 2007. By all accounts, that means there are a lot of prescription bottles taking up space in landfills. How can they be repurposed instead?

Some veterinarians will take your empty prescription bottles, and a quick call will determine if there is such a program in your area. Some pharmacists will also reuse your own prescription bottles to refill your prescriptions. You can ask or make the suggestion at the pharmacy of your choice. Some highly-persistent recyclers have insisted that their medicine be dispensed in envelopes rather than plastic containers in an effort to reduce the circulation of more prescription bottles into the system.

If you strike out using the previous methods, many people have found unique uses for their prescription bottles (after washing) -- including holders for nails, tacks, pins and needles. Prescription bottles can hold a plastic grocery bag or two, and can easily be stored in your car or purse to have ready the next time you forget your reusable shopping bags.

They can also hold:

- ➔ Seeds, labeled according to the type of seed stored inside.
- ➔ Buttons, beads and other small craft items.
- ➔ Anything small and loose including paperclips, toothpicks, nails, screws, nuts and bolts.
- ➔ Emergency aid kit for the car, containing band-aids, tweezers and antiseptic wipes.
- ➔ Eyeglass repair kit.

What about larger items, such as furniture? It's always possible to donate used or outdated furniture, lamps and home accessories to not-for-profit thrift and resale stores for reuse. You can also repair, repaint, or mend those items yourself.



Start small, and practice on a piece of furniture that has a minor problem and isn't your favorite. A hammer, nails or screws, and some wood glue may be all that's necessary to repair a piece of furniture that was ready for the donation pile.

For a fraction of what a new lamp might set you back, you can easily re-wire a non-working, dated lamp and purchase a new shade to give it a fresh look.

Refinishing and recovering/reupholstering furniture can make a big difference, too. If your patio furniture is looking old and tired, but is still in good shape, try refurbishing it with new a new color and new cushions, rather than replacing it with a new set. Once you've prepped the furniture, give it a second life with fresh coats of stain or paint.

The stain you use will determine the color of the wood once it's finished. Water-based stains may be the best choice because they are more environmentally friendly and offer easy cleanup using soap and water.

Apply stain evenly with a cloth or paintbrush and allow it to thoroughly penetrate the surface. Wipe off any excess stain with a clean cloth and allow the piece to dry completely. Once the piece is dry, lightly sand between coats with fine-grit sandpaper. You can use one coat for a light stain or apply additional coats to achieve a darker color.



If you use paint, a low Volatile-Organic-Compound (VOC) paint is safer for the environment and indoor air quality.