

Tips from readers of
www.cottagesmallholder.com

some of the most inventive, creative and
damn fine people I know!

All ideas used at your own risk
Please take sensible precautions

All trademarks duly acknowledged

Typed out neatly-ish by Ruthdigs ☺

The Cottage Smallholder's

Reader's

little book of

Recycling tips

and

Pest defence tricks

for the garden



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"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need."

Cicero

"The love of gardening is a seed once sown never dies"

Gertrude Jekyll

"There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments."

Janet Kilburn Phillips

"When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant."

Anon

"Despite the gardener's best intentions, Nature will improvise."

Michael P. Garafalo

"A fruit is a vegetable with looks and money. Plus, if you let fruit rot, it turns into wine, something Brussels sprouts never do."

P.J. O'Rourke

"Gardening requires lots of water - most of it in the form of perspiration."

Lou Erickson

"Unemployment is capitalism's way of getting you to plant a garden."

Orson Scott Card

"God made rainy days so gardeners could get the housework done."

Anon

"It pleases me to take amateur photographs of my garden, and it pleases my garden to make my photographs look professional."

Robert Brault

"We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."

Abraham Lincoln

"Plants cry their gratitude for the sun in green joy."

Astrid Alauda

~ RECYCLING & RE-USING ~

Traps: This is a way for organic gardeners to use slug pellets safely without scattering them on the ground and potentially poisoning other birds/animals too. Cut a sideways H into the side of an empty plastic bottle an inch or so from the base. Bend the flaps inward. Weight the bottom with a stone and place slug pellets inside. Place round garden/plot. Slugs can get in and eat the pellets and die but pellets aren't on your soil going into the food chain. Also good if you're concerned about friendly beasties like stag beetles drowning in beer traps.

Ruthdigs

Sowing

New Labels: Cut up white plastic containers to make new plant labels. For larger ones use off cut pieces of wood.

Erika - Lunar Organics

Toilet roll inner tubes: Save these to sow seed in and plant directly outside. In particular those varieties that don't like root disturbance and have longer roots e.g. runner and broad beans, sweet peas.

Holly & Su

You can also use the tubes as a shorter more traditional 'pot' with a base. Fold tube flat, open out, turn round 90° and fold flat again; making a square tube. Cut up each fold on one end (the same length as the width of the tube) and bend the resulting flaps up inside the tube. Reach inside the tube and push the flaps out again to give a flat base.

Mrs Green

Tea bags: Put a used tea bag in the base of your toilet roll as a plug.

Peter

Egg boxes: Use egg boxes to chit potatoes in.

Catrin

Use the individual cells of egg boxes to sow seeds into and plant directly into the ground.

Su

Egg shells: Use as mini pots for seeds. With a little crack to the bottom can then be planted out.

Gillian

Drinks cups: Use washed out plastic cups from work as seedling pots.

Polystyrene cups will give better insulation to the first sowings of the year.

Ruthdigs

Newspaper pots: Roll a tube the width of a toilet roll inner but longer, fold the top and bottom edge inside to keep together and stack in deep plant pots. Fill whole thing with compost to sow into, this helps retain moisture and is all planted out when the time comes.

Liz

Use newspaper to make origami pots to sow seeds in. (Lots of links if you search 'origami paper seed pots'.)

Peter

Spirit packaging: Use the heavy duty card cylinders that scotch etc comes in for growing carrots. Make holes in bottom and fill with compost. Especially good if you have stony ground.

Polly

'Propagator' lids: Use the large plastic bins that organic field lettuces come in (in the USA) and use on a seedling tray for a green house top.

Paula

Lighting: Reuse a shop strip light as a grow light. You get the best spectrum of light by using 2 different tubes; one grow tube and one regular fluorescent tube.

Paula

Drain tray: Reuse an old shower curtain stapled up at the corners for a drain tray.

Paula

Plastic food trays: Plastic food trays i.e. mushrooms/ready meals washed out are ready for use as seed trays; especially handy when growing small amounts for swapping.

Jane

Use them to sit your toilet roll tubes in.

Paula & Kate (UK)

Use the deep see through ones that fruit comes in atop solid trays to make a mini propagator for the windowsill.

Kate (UK)

Barricades:

Slugs: Use plastic bottles to make plastic collars. Cut an approx 3 inch section. Cut points all round one end; like a crown. Fold the points outwards and place round your brassicas / seedlings etc.

Mrs Green

Sprinkle a ring of crushed egg shells round plants helps keep the slugs at bay. Be careful not to disturb the line.

Gillian

Used coffee grounds spread around the base of the plant.

Ruthdigs

Codling moth: Having removed 4 small apples from the cluster wrap a 'ped' (those stocking things with which ladies try on shoes) around the remaining king apple and rubber band at the stem. This keeps the codling moths off the fruit. As the apple gets bigger the ped stretches thinner and thinner so the sun can get at the fruit and ripen it, and the threat of the codling moth larvae is long gone.

Paula

Rabbits: Fence round your plot with chicken wire ensuring you bury the edges up to 3 feet deep so they don't burrow under.

Catrin

Voles etc: Nail hardware cloth into the bottoms of your planter boxes.

Paula

Squirrels: To keep squirrels out of nut trees ensure they are plated well away from buildings and fences. Affix metal cones to the trunks to keep the squirrels from climbing up. These can be fashioned from large 3 litre cans that olive oil etc comes in.

This method could also be used for a bird feeder.

Paula

Crows / birds: Cover corn cobs with paper bags to prevent crows from eating them.

Paula

~ PESTS ~

Deterrents:

Cats: Human pee on the fence posts has done a great job at keeping cats out.

Paula

Lion poo (in pellet form – silentroaronline.com) will deter cats as it is the smell of a bigger predator.

Citrus has been said to deter cats e.g. lemon peel etc.

Mandi

Twiggy prunings, especially of holly will keep cats from newly planted beds.

Kate (UK)

Birds: Hang free cds / DVDs across the plot to catch the sunlight and annoy and scare the birds off when they flash and glint. Especially good for pigeons over your brassicas.

Jane & Polly

Tie lengths of old VHS tapes to a line and string over your plot. The tape rustles and moves in the wind.

Can also use lengths of cut up plastic shopping bags; the 'rustly' type is best, or red and white warning tape that gets left behind after builders have been.

Ruthdigs

Cut flaps in the side of empty plastic bottles and bend them out to catch the wind. Place inverted bottle on top of a cane so it can spin freely and rattle.

Ruthdigs

Rabbits: Rags soaked in vinegar deter rabbits as they hate the smell of it.

Erika – Lunar Organics

Blackfly: Mix garlic granules with water and spray your plants, e.g. broad beans. Reapply after rain.

Ruthdigs

Use the deep ones that mini cakes come in upside down as a full self contained mini windowsill propagator.

Ruthdigs

Card boxes & foil: Cut a box in half diagonally and line with ends of foil or off cuts from radiator reflector. Stand your windowsill propagator in it and it will reflect both light and warmth onto your seedlings.

Kate (UK)

Plastic bottles: Cut the base off 2 litre 'pop' bottles to make a mini cloche.

Jane

Growing & support:

Support sticks: When walking in the woods pick up long thin sticks to use as pea sticks. Much better than imported bamboo canes!

Catrin

Use garden woody prunings trimmed in place of canes.

Kate (UK)

Save your (real) christmas tree to cut into twiggy bits to grow peas and beans up.

mrspao

Fruit nets: Use old netting; the type that oranges come in, to tie around fruit or veg that are trailing and becoming heavy. The netting is then tied back to something solid e.g. a stake / your fence. The weight is then supported and as the net is stretchy further growth is not impeded.

Cookie Girl

Old tights/stockings: Use as bags to support melons, squashes etc.

Can be cut up to be used as soft but strong plant ties, allowing the plant to still expand.

Kate (UK)

Plastic ties from packaging: Use them to secure wayward plants and tomato plants to their stakes.

Jane & Mrs Green

Compost bags: Use a double layer as potato sacks, roll tops stop slugs / snails getting in.

Flatten and use to line raised beds to help retain moisture.

Kate (UK)

Polystyrene: Use sheets from packaging to insulate the floor of the greenhouse in winter.

Also use to line walls of raised beds.

Break up for drainage in pots, its lightness makes heavy large pots a little easier to move.

Kate (UK)

Break up trays that seedlings come in and use in the bottom of larger pots. Lighter and cheaper than filling the whole pot with compost.

Ruthdigs

Chimney pots: Use as planters, e.g. for herbs.

Jenny Thame

Use to force rhubarb or grow seakale. If forcing ensure to exclude light with a lid at the top.

Peter

Bubble Wrap: Use to line pots made of metal to keep plant roots cool in summer.

Wrap outdoor pots in winter for insulation to prevent roots freezing / pots cracking. Secure in place with bulldog clips / pegs.

Use to line greenhouse – insulation in winter and shading in summer.

Kate (UK)

Bird feeders: Save dripping to make fat balls for the birds.

mrsbao

Wood: Keep garden twiggy prunings as kindling for the winter. (NOT Laurel.)

Kate (UK)

Ash: Use ash to insulate with; for rocket stoves.

Paula

Seeds: Make sure you keep your seed packets somewhere very dry at all times. If they get damp at any time then they will not germinate. Do not put them into drawers beneath the sink if there is the remotest chance of moisture. Or somewhere subject to extreme hot/cold. Keep them in an airtight container, preferably in the house, not in a shed. That way, they should last until the use-by date, meaning that one packet could supply several years of seed!

Linda

Planting: Make use of surplus round paper coffer filters to line pots with in place of heavy rocks or gravel.

Ruthdigs

Leave some of the spent compost in the bottom of big planter pots. This saves the cost of all that fresh compost. (Use with more shallow rooted varieties.)

Liz

Skips: Keep an eye out for skips / refurbishment work going on in your area. Most places don't mind you taking skip contents but ensure you ask. Otherwise it is technically theft!

Ruthdigs

Coffee grounds: Can be used as slug deterrent and for composting. Starbucks give them away free if you ask.

Cold Frame: Utilise an old glass door (e.g. the sliding kind) as a lid for a cold frame. Build the frame to fit and your lid comes with the handle ready-made.

Tamar

Shed: Use old discarded doors to build a shed, putting any glazed ones at the front to maximise the light.

Use pallets as the base for your shed.

Ruthdigs

You can use pallets to build a shed, far sturdier than feather board.

Lucy

Compost bin: Make a compost bin from old pallets. Either screw together with brackets or put posts through the 'corners'.

Lucy

Allotment furniture: Use discarded big wooden reels that come with cable / piping on as stools or tables for your allotment or garden. Paint, stain or varnish to weatherproof and smarten up.

Ruthdigs

Shade: Utilise the burlap wrapping from buying rugs as a rustic shade for your allotment seating area / chicken run.

Paula

General thrifty tips:

Apples: Use unripe apples to cook into jelly for the pectin. Freeze for use with low pectin summer fruits in jam making.

Freecycle / Freegle: Swap plants and seeds; ensures no waste and is a cost effective way of recycling.

Jane

Great resource for pots and other garden bits. It's all about reuse and keeping good stuff out of landfill.

Jenny Thame

Composting & soil care:

Cardboard: Use flattened boxes as mulch / weed suppressant.

Paula

Shred corrugated cardboard and add to a wormery. Keeps it dry and the worms love it.

Add shredded card or paper / newspaper to compost bins, helps aerate and dry if needed

Peter

Packing 'noodles/peanuts': Rinse one under a tap and if it melts (made of organic matter) add to the compost heap.

Paula

Spent compost: Dig spent compost from grow bags and potato bags into raised beds to help enrich it. Will improve texture of clay soils.

Jane

Animal waste: Recycle sheep poo into a liquid fertilizer to nourish your plants.

Rosie

Compost chicken poo and use as fertilizer once rotted down.

Jane

Charcoal: Inoculate with urine / compost tea and use for fertilizer for the garden.

Paula

Fruit: Put rotten / squidgy fruit / windfalls in a bucket of water and leave to ferment. Gets your compost working beautifully.

Kate (UK)

Carpet: Cover your compost or manure heap with an old carpet to aid it rotting in the winter when the temperatures are lower. Giving you compost ready to dig in by the spring.

Jenny Thame

Tools & Accessories:

Tins: Make a hole in the bottom and hang from a hook onto netting / trellis for a hanging herb garden.

Scoops: Use washed out tins as scoops.

The big tough yoghurt pots make excellent compost scoops.

Kate (UK)

Use a plastic one pint milk carton with the base removed as a compost scoop complete with handle. You can then 'pour' the compost out as a funnel to fill items such as toilet roll inners. Simply retain the lid for use as a regular scoop.

Ruthdigs

Cane toppers: Cut a circle of bubble wrap and wrap it round a piece of polystyrene. Fix on top of cane with a rubber band. (Red ones posties drop everywhere makes this completely free!)

Kate (UK)

Take an old cork and gouge out a hole just the diameter of your cane for a snug fit. This ensures will not blow off. Paint or varnish for longevity.

Use snail or sea shells of the appropriate shape – either can be painted or varnished to withstand the elements / add a touch of fun.

Ruthdigs

Small yoghurt drink bottles like the 'Benecol' type ones make a good cane topper.

Peter

Fruit Cage: Couple netting with the yoghurt drink cane toppers above and elastic bands. The bands fix securely to the ridge at the bottom of the pot.

Peter

Mini Storage Heater: Put a nightlight in a saucer, light it and put an upturned terracotta pot on top. Stand in your

greenhouse near the tender plants and it will act as a mini storage heater.

Kate (UK)

Notice board: Hang an old roofing slate up in your shed / on the outside for a chalkboard for a 'things to do' / planning guide / message board. Can also be used inside the home.

Ruthdigs

Storage:

Tins: Keep tin boxes / canisters with lids for mouse-proof storage in shed / greenhouse. Paint with leftover Hammerite / gloss / car paint.

Kate (UK)

Save the big tins chocolates come in for seed tins – dry and rodent proof.

Ruthdigs

Silica: Save the little bags of silica gel that come with shoes, bags etc and put inside your mouse proof storage to keep stuff dry.

Kate (UK)

Jars: Take a large jam jar with a lid; make a hole in the top. Put string in jar, put on lid with string threaded through hole. Mouse-proof string dispenser.

Kate (UK)

Hooks: Use old coat hooks from hallways etc in the shed for tool storage.

Ruthdigs

Structures & suchlike:

Raised Beds: Use scrap lengths of wood to make raised beds.

Lucy

If dismantling decking, this is ideal for raised beds and /or planter boxes. Plastic decking means no rotting!

Paula