

Diggin' It

Earth Day: 10 ways to go green in the garden

10 ways any gardener can go green -- practice sustainability -- in the garden on Earth Day and all year.

By [Judy Lowe](#) / April 22, 2011

Gardeners love the Earth and working in harmony with nature, or they wouldn't be gardeners. But sometimes I (and maybe you?) need to be reminded of how we can do even more to "go green" in the garden.



These gerbera daisies packaged by Costa Farms are growing in a SoilWrap pot, which is biodegradable and planted directly in the soil. There's no plastic pot, which is good for the environment.

Courtesy of Costa Farms

Here are a few ways that I've found:

Buy plants in biodegradable pots. [Costa Farms](#), [Ball Horticultural Co.](#), and Bonnie's Plant Farm – which provide millions of transplants to garden centers across the [US](#) – are now providing seedlings in biodegradable pots [that you plant right in the ground](#). I have used the pots from all three companies, and hope this is the future of bedding plants.

Start your own seedlings in biodegradable pots, such as [Cow Pots](#). Or repurpose containers that you have on hand. Gardeners have long started seeds in foam egg cartons, newspaper pots ([here's a video](#) that shows how to make newspaper pots), and cut-apart 2-liter drink bottles.

Use recycled containers to grow plants. I love these [can planters](#). So retro. And these [self-watering plant pots](#) made from 2-liter soft drink bottles are clever. (Here's [the how-to link](#).)

Recycle or reuse plastic garden pots. Check with the nursery or garden center when you buy plants to see if it will take the pots back and reuse or recycle them. Many [Lowe's](#) stores do this. So do many [other organizations](#). And [Colleen Vanderlinden](#) has come up with [25 ways to reuse](#) those old nursery pots. Or how about [planting an herb garden](#) in an old gift basket?

Compost. This is the ultimate recycling project in the garden. There's no excuse for not reusing fall leaves to create summer mulch instead of sending the leaves to the overburdened landfill and buying bags of mulch the next spring. Composting is easy. Anyone can do it, says [Karan Davis Cutler](#) in her article, "[Even when you don't follow the rules, compost happens](#)."

Rethink buying bags of garden mulch. If you need more mulch than you can create in your own yard, find out if your community offers free mulch to residents. Many collect leaves in the fall, compost them over winter, and let people pick up what they need in spring.

Be water-wise. Use drip or trickle irrigation and consider [reusing some household washing water](#) in the garden. Or use a rain barrel. [According to Sandra Mason](#) of the [University of Illinois Extension Service](#), "one inch of rain over 1,000 square feet of area yields 623 gallons. Rainfall at the rate of 1 inch per hour will yield about 10 gallons per minute per 1,000 square feet. It doesn't take long to fill a few barrels of free, unsoftened water. The kind of water plants love."

Plant for bees, butterflies, birds, and other small wildlife. Humans continue to encroach on the territory that wild creatures call home, depriving them of places to live, breed, and find the food they prefer. Here's a list of plants [to attract bees and butterflies](#). The [National Wildlife Federation](#) has an excellent [wildlife habitat program](#) that's easy to follow. And the [National Wildflower Center](#) will help you discover what [plants are native to your area](#), so that you can grow them and help nature.

Go organic or use integrated pest management (IPM). There's no point in attracting butterflies, hummingbirds, and other wild creatures to our yards and then possibly harming them with chemicals. If you're not ready to go totally organic, [consider IPM](#).

Plant to attract beneficial insects. This is another aspect of using no or fewer pesticides – letting [“good bugs”](#) such as ladybugs and praying mantises help you out.

How have you gone green in the garden? Share your suggestions below.

Judy Lowe is the founder of the [Diggin' it](#) blog and a longtime garden writer. Her latest garden book, about how to create many different types of [herb theme gardens](#), has just been published.