

# CHAPTER 12 RESOURCEFUL LIVING

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## INTRODUCTION

**B**y making simple changes in our everyday choices, it is possible to consume in ways that benefit ourselves, our families and our communities.

In the sustainable consumption chapter we learned that there is a need on a systems level to shift not only how much we consume but also how we consume. Economic metrics currently focus on the movement of consumable products and the money exchanged. Research shows that such metrics do not do a good job of measuring satisfaction and whether basic needs are being met. The chapter described different ways that we can measure success so that it includes values such as the protection of our natural resources and improved quality of life for all people.

But what does this look like on a personal level? Are there ways that we can refocus our lives in the same way? The material world is an essential component of the human experience. Food, medicine, clothing, housing, art and books all contribute to our well-being. But evidence mounts that the accumulation of material possessions, once our basic needs are met, does not help us feel more creative, connected, secure and healthy. There is indeed such a thing as enough when it comes to possessions.

This chapter will focus on four broad strategies that have been shown to satisfy residents' desires to save money, support the community, conserve natural resources and reduce climate emissions, all while enjoying more time with friends and family. The four broad strategies are: 1. reuse, 2. borrow, rent or share, 3. fix and maintain and 4. buy smart. You will learn about how to find specific resources that will help you and your community practice these strategies.

This chapter will also share how Master Recyclers can focus payback hours on resourceful living by connecting people to these existing resources and organizing projects in your own communities that create even more opportunities to take these four actions.



### Four strategies of resourceful living:

1. *Reuse*
2. *Borrow, rent or share*
3. *Fix and maintain*
4. *Buy Smart*



**TERM**

**Reuse** is about reusing something exactly as it was meant to be used without having to process it like we do for recycling. Reuse can also be about thinking differently about the objects around us and seeing if they can meet new needs.

**REUSE**

Upcycled or repurposed, second hand, salvage and vintage – all of these words essentially mean **reuse**, and reusing can save you money and space and avoid waste. Need clothes, storage solutions, back-to-school supplies or craft materials? Many of these items can easily be found at second-hand stores, or you may even have what you need on-hand but not recognize it.

The easiest form of reuse is to use durable products instead of disposable products. We don't usually think of using our dinner plates as reusing them, but when we are at a food cart our food is delivered in a disposable single use container. We can reuse a coffee mug or water bottle, a take-away container, and packaging for lunch at work. We can even use durable boxes for moving instead of cardboard boxes that need to be recycled.

**Purchase reused**

Explore our region's many second-hand stores to find new-to-you clothing, furniture, electronics, household or craft items, salvaged building materials and more.

It is important to close the loop with reuse. To fully recycle we don't just place recyclables in the cart, we must also make a market for those recycled products by purchasing products that are made from recycled material. The same is true for reuse. Some reuse organizations are about getting materials to communities who do not have the resources to purchase new, but many of the organizations that we donate to also depend on the resale of reused materials to help with operation costs. The reuse business community is entirely about the resale of products, so they need customers. If we want to see the reuse community (be it non-profit or for-profit) thrive we must see them as not just a place to donate but also a place to get what we need. Free Geek, SCRAP, and the Community Warehouse are non-profits that serve important purposes in our community. They also all have shops packed with all sorts of treasures!

Non-profit and for-profit resale shops exist in all parts of our region. Do some internet searching using phrases like: resale, vintage, consignment, second hand and gently used. You will find places to buy used furniture, tools, an electrical cord, clothes and baby accessories. Also, check your local library to find out when their next book sale will take place and find reading treasures while you support an important resource in the community.



**RESOURCE**

- **Free Geek** provides free computers, technology and education to people who would not otherwise have access through the reuse and recycling of old computers.
- **SCRAP** inspires creative reuse and art through community education projects and the creative reuse and donation center.
- **Community Warehouse** is Oregon's only furniture bank. They provide gently used household items to people transitioning back into housing and have locations in Northeast Portland and Tualatin.

## Online reuse shopping

Did you think just because you prefer to use your laptop to shop that you would be left out of reuse shopping? Well, think again! There are many great resources for the online shopper. Most of us are familiar with Freecycle or Craigslist as great ways to find bargains, but there are many more resources for reuse online. Through websites like Poshmark, Copious Threadflip and eBay you can shop closets all over America and sell your clothes too! Support Free Geek and Community Warehouse by exploring some of their special finds listed online.

## Can reuse be communal?

Swapping is nothing new, but it is experiencing a revival. People in our region swap everything from tools, clothes, baby accessories, plants and seeds, and skills and knowledge.

**Swap Positive** promotes *free frugal and fun* by listing over 25 regular Free Swap events that take place from Sherwood to Beaverton, Portland to Milwaukie.

Portland community centers, called Swap n Plays, exist in Gresham and in East, Southeast, Northeast and North Portland. These community hubs are gathering places for play, conversation and swapping children's toys, accessories and clothes.



## Repurposing

So far we have been talking about reusing items in the way that they were originally meant to be used. We can also avoid having to run to the store every time we have a need by **repurposing** the objects that we already have around to meet a new or different need.

The objects around us can have so much more use if we expand our concept of what we can do with them. If a solid wood door is taken out of a house before demolition and doesn't fit any of the new door frames, it has outlived its purpose. But that is true only if we consider it a door. If we consider it a solid slab of wood, the potential uses multiply. It could be used as a desktop or fit together with other doors to make a solid wood floor.

## RESOURCE

- **Swap Positive** is a non-profit that provides training and ground rules for coordinators to organize Free Swaps. The website lists 25 regular Free Swaps plus a blog for one-time Free Swaps. Coordinators focus on sizes and types of items to be swapped. If you love clothes (or electronics, toys or other stuff), and you love being with fun, thrifty, kind people – why not start a swap? They also organize a holiday gift Free Swap each year.
- **Woodlawn Swap n Play, St. Johns Swapnplay and Southside Swap & Play** are cooperatives that include indoor play areas, ongoing exchange of kid's clothing and toys, and all sorts of events and classes. This model encourages reuse instead of buying new as well as building positive relationships — a great message to pass on to kids.

## TERM

**Repurpose:** the use of something for a purpose other than its original one.



## Reuse for Master Recycler hours

Want to see more opportunities for people to reuse, repurpose and swap in your area? Make it happen! Master Recyclers spend hundreds of hours every year helping their neighbors and coworkers reuse, repurpose and swap.

Reuse projects can be small-scale. Invite your friends and family to a party where everyone brings items that are in good condition. Put on some music. Add some food. And let folks peruse for new found treasures. Some Master Recyclers have these parties so frequently they actually rotate the topic. At one party, they swap clothes, while the next is focused on kitchen supplies or books.

*Portland neighborhood associations hold annual collection events for household bulky waste, recycling and reuse. For a reasonable charge or donation, neighbors can dispose of items cluttering up their garages and basements. The seven neighborhood coalitions have listings of the scheduled cleanup events.*

Save your company money by repurposing the supply room to a reuse and supply room. (One Master Recycler calls it *the room of requirement*. For those of you who haven't read the Harry Potter series this is a magical room that appears when you are in great need of it). You can regularly encourage coworkers to replace unused supplies and go there first before looking for new supplies. You can even set up a process so that the office purchaser calls on the staff to return supplies and inventories of existing materials before new ones are ordered.

Help neighbors make a little money by organizing a neighborhood-wide garage sale. In Portland, Master Recyclers participate in their local neighborhood cleanups by organizing a reuse or you-price-it area.

Perhaps you want to organize a larger scale project. Swap Positive (mentioned before) and the Center for a New American Dream both offer extensive information (available online) on how to organize a community swap event. Find videos, instructions and case studies focusing on how to organize a community swap on the Center for a New American Dream's website. There they talk about swapping everything from seeds to toys, food to books. Don't forget you can invite other Master Recyclers to join you in the planning by putting an announcement in the Newsletter. Apartments and condo communities are also fantastic settings for a swap event.

A team of Master Recyclers helped solve a huge, bulky waste problem at Pacific University by organizing swap events in the spring, right before the students left for the summer and dumped their extra futons, night stands and desks. The University stored what didn't get taken and then had a free stuff event in the fall for incoming students.

## BORROW, RENT OR SHARE

Who doesn't have a drill that sits charged and ready for that moment when you decide to tighten the screw on the loose cabinet door in the kitchen? There are many objects in our lives that sit idle waiting for a seasonal or temporary time when we need them. From power washers to snow shoes, we can reduce clutter and free up space by borrowing, sharing or renting these products. Sharing, borrowing and renting can be as simple as loaning a specialty baking pan to your neighbor, renting a rototiller from your hardware store down the street, or simply checking out books from the library. Renting supports the local service industry while purchasing new may support unfair labor practices in other countries. Borrowing and sharing builds community by fostering connections with neighbors and friends, which makes the region a better place for all of us.

### Libraries: more than just books to borrow

There is something truly satisfying about curling up to a good book and our libraries have millions of them. But did you know that there is so much more you can borrow in our local libraries? Movies, video games and music are available at just about every library branch in our region. Library community spaces are free to reserve and use for meetings and workshops. Each library is a hidden source of fun stuff to check out. Many local libraries have a Cultural Pass or My Discovery program, which lets families check out one-day passes to local cultural venues such as the Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, and the Oregon Zoo. Go into the Hillsboro Library catalog and search for, *Library of Things*. Twenty pages will pop up with stuff that you can borrow with your library card, including: slow cookers, cherry pitters, puzzles, tortilla presses, and even a Jack-o-Lantern cake pan.

### Tools when you need them

The easiest way to reduce the number of tools you have to store in your shed is to get in the habit of borrowing and loaning tools with your neighbors. However, some folks find it hard to do this if they don't know their neighbors well enough to trust them with expensive equipment or they may be afraid of breaking their neighbor's prized power tool.

Luckily, the community has other ways to get tools you need. Tool libraries are membership-based resources that build community and foster sustainability by providing nearby neighbors with tools and empowering them to use them. Most local hardware stores as well as large ones like Home Depot have rental services as well.

Cooking tools are becoming increasingly available to borrow or rent as well. The NE and SE Kitchen Shares are cooperatives that loan out dehydrators, canning equipment, ice cream makers, juicers, mixers, bread makers, durable dishes and more. Other local places where residents can borrow or rent kitchen items include the Home Goods Library in Southeast Portland.

#### TOOL LIBRARIES



Southeast Portland Tool Library, Northeast Portland Tool Library, North Portland Tool Library and Green Lents Tool Library all check out tools to residents of the area they serve. The Portland Community ToolBank provides tools for charities who are painting schools, building ramps for injured veterans, repairing seniors' roofs, landscaping public spaces, and more.



## Special events

Planning a wedding, birthday party or community gathering can be expensive and end up generating a lot of waste. We often clutter our lives with table settings, furniture and formal wear just so that they can be used for events that happen sometimes years apart. We even live in larger living quarters to accommodate the occasions when we need to cook large meals, house guests and have large gatherings. Some people are choosing to break free of these objects and live in smaller quarters by looking to community space to serve these special events. Churches, schools and some restaurants will loan or rent kitchen space. Linens, table settings, and furniture for events can all be rented at a price usually much less than the cost of purchasing them. Search on the internet for words like *party rental* or *event rental* and you will find affordable options all over the region. Several of the Swap n Plays mentioned earlier also have dishware that local residents can check out for family reunions or company picnics. Something Borrowed Vintage Rentals is a local business (owned by a Master Recycler) that rents vintage props, furniture and decor for your wedding or event.

## Master Recyclers and sharing

Just about any community that you are a member of could benefit from a little more sharing. It takes trust to share, but research shows that sharing also builds trust. Two Master Recyclers in Hillsboro organized a tool sharing program with their home owners' association. Thanks to another Master Recycler's project, the Alameda Elementary School has a classroom party kit that teachers share. Rather than every classroom needing its own set of dishes, napkins and party decorations, one set is stored in the supply room for teachers to check out. A Master Recycler in the Pearl District of Portland helped her neighbors save space in their studio apartment building by identifying a communal space where shared tools, equipment, kitchen gadgets and cleaning supplies can be stored.

If you are feeling more ambitious, the New American Dream Guide to Sharing (available online) has step-by-step instructions on how to start a lending library in your area.

## FIX AND MAINTAIN

**There is a growing repair movement that is empowering people to make their stuff last longer.**

Maintenance and repair can be surprisingly easy and creative, too. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, how-to classes and online tutorials can help you improve your sewing, bike or home repair skills quickly. YouTube has an endless supply of resourceful people who have uploaded their success in fixing just about anything you could possibly need to fix. iFixit.com includes a forum where people upload step by step instructions for fixing everything from your smart phone to your coffee maker. iFixit even sells parts and tools that might be necessary to do the job.

Not feeling so handy yourself? You would be surprised how economical it can be to take your broken object to a local repair shop. There is a lively economy based on the repair industry. Simply Google tailor, alterations, furniture restoration, cobbler, computer repair, or lawn mower repair and you'll likely discover a nearby business that is ready to help.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Basic maintenance extends the life of your stuff, saving you money while reducing waste. Keeping our appliances running smoothly and efficiently can even save energy during the use phase of these products.

### Repair events

Master Recyclers participate in events aimed at extending the life of stuff in our area. In these events handy volunteers (often Master Recyclers) offer to help fix small appliances, sew hems and tune up bikes. Events in Portland and Gresham are called by Repair Cafes and events in Washington County are called Repair Fairs. Master Recyclers also help organize, promote and greet fair goers for volunteer hours.



## BUY SMART

All of the strategies mentioned so far are about ways to get what we need without having to purchase a new product. But there are times when you do need to purchase something new. Planning ahead, researching product choices and rethinking gifts are three areas where we can maximize our purchasing power and minimize our negative impacts.

### Plan before you shop

For groceries, make a list based on your plans for the week, then shop your cupboards and fridge first, crossing off the items you already have on hand. At the store, stick to your list. Consider purchasing in bulk so that you can buy the exact quantity you need. For consumable products, such as paint or decking stain, measure the area that you plan to cover and check your shelves to see if you already have some on hand. At the store, read the label to find out the amount you can expect to need to cover the area you measured.





## How was the product made?

Choose quality, durable products rather than disposable items. For example, buy Mason jar drinking glasses or stainless steel canteens, rather than disposable cups or bottled water. Select items that are durable and that can be repaired when they wear out. For example, buy shoes which can be resoled. Consider the materials options for each product. For each material, can you weigh the carbon footprint of the extraction and production, its toxicity, and how workers were treated?

## Think outside the gift box

Holidays, birthdays, weddings and anniversaries bring special pressures to purchase the perfect gift. Gifts of experiences (rather than stuff) offer loved ones a chance for a memorable outing, and remove the potential for pressure to find space for something they may not need. Who doesn't love tickets to a show or a special spa service? How about donating to a cause or organization important to the person? Does the person you want to buy for have a special talent or want to learn something new? If so, a class might make a perfect gift. How about taking your loved one on a tour of a local vineyard or a historic area? If you have a lifetime event where people will want you to set up a registry, consider companies that offer options for gifts of experiences. So Kind Registry is one non-profit registry. There are also some for-profit online platforms that will help you set up a registry so that your guests can purchase part of your honeymoon.

## TRANSITIONS

Major life transitions such as a move or the birth or adoption of a child as well as seasonal transitions such as spring cleaning, back-to-school and holidays are often times of heightened consumption. They are also times of heightened advertising pressure and consumers are bombarded with messaging. Rather than let advertisers and businesses suggest what you want and need, why not decide more independently and carefully consider your personal needs and resources. This could lead to decreased consumption, lower expenses, and increased satisfaction. To be sure, a new baby needs a place to sleep, clothes to wear and toys that entertain and provide stimulus. But these needs can likely be met creatively and at a lower cost by using some of the strategies presented in this chapter.

Times of major life transitions can also be opportunities for behavior change. People may be more receptive to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Just as sharing, borrowing and creative purchasing help us bring more meaning to our daily lives, these strategies can also help us ensure that our life transitions reflect our values.



## RESOURCEFUL PDX

The City of Portland developed the Resourceful PDX program to give Portland residents tools and ideas for reducing waste, and specifically, to let them know how to take action and where to find resources.

The City conducted research through phone surveys and focus groups and learned that a diverse range of Portlanders feel that taking the actions described in this chapter would make life more interesting. It would leave them with more time to spend with their families. They would save money and feel more creative. They also thought that it would be good for the local economy and the environment.

What Portlanders also said is that they do not know where to go or how to do some of these actions. So the program focuses not on why we should make these changes, but on how to do so and where to go.



### RESOURCE

Visit the *Resourceful PDX* website and blog for more information.

### The Resourceful PDX campaign:

- Connects residents with resources, including community-based organizations, local businesses, government agencies, and each other, to help them be successful in reducing waste.
- Offers resources specific to times of life transition that are often periods of increased stress, pressure, clutter, consumption and waste. These transitions create opportunities to try simple changes and reduce waste. The program focuses on a number of specific transitions: Moving, Growing Family, Home Improvement, and Kids in School.
- Provides on-going ideas and tips of how to use these resources.

To get these resources out in the community, Resourceful PDX uses a blog, a website and advertisements, as well as an information booth (staffed by Master Recyclers, of course). Resourceful PDX also partners with community groups to help spread their key messages. In 2016, the City will begin to research the types of organizations, professionals and individuals who Portlanders typically come into contact with during major life transitions. The hope is that eventually employers who recruit people to Portland, wedding planners, real estate agents, and others will be equipped to share the Resourceful PDX resources and messages with their clients right when they are looking for and most receptive to these resources.



## CONCLUSION

Let's face it: materials matter. From the delicious pasta shared with a friend, to the pendant given as a gift, materials contribute much toward our health and well-being. They are sustaining parts of the human experience.

Unfortunately, the rate at which we produce, consume, use and discard materials has serious global environmental and social consequences. The United States' relentless fixation on low price products has created a marketplace that is full of cheap, disposable products that people discard with little thought.



Today, our relationship with our material possessions is, all too often, turned on its head. Instead of seeking material possessions that meet our personal needs, we are increasingly becoming defined by our things. Popular culture (driven by massive advertising campaigns) has manufactured portraits of who we should be. Teens are especially vulnerable to relying on their things to feel accepted, attractive, and good about themselves. And the drive to purchase all this stuff leaves Americans on what is often referred to as a *work-to-spend treadmill*. Many of us are working harder and working longer hours so we can consume more.



We can, however, do things differently. We can decide for ourselves what it is we need (or even want) rather than waiting for someone else to tell us. We can determine for ourselves what is enough stuff based on our internal values rather than someone else's profit margin. We might decide to fill some needs with things, but research shows that we are most satisfied by making connections in our community and family, and by focusing on our health and that of our families. Many of the activities, like sharing and borrowing, described throughout this chapter give us opportunities to connect with others in our community. Even investing in local services helps us feel more connected to the people around us.



Another key way of changing our relationship with our stuff is to recognize that materials are actually vibrant parts of our experience on this planet. The discount culture has cheapened their value. But turning against materialism is not necessarily the answer as it denies the physical world that is our reality.



What if we turned around instead and learned again to truly love our possessions? If we cared deeply about our things again, we would want to find out where they came from and what they are made of. We would ask who made them. We would take care of them and share them with others. We would fix them when they get damaged. And we would find a good place for their next life cycle — be it reuse, repurposing or recycling.