

Recycling in your garden

BY SIOUX ROGERS

With my mind in a mumble-jumble of ever-overcrowded thoughts, I could not even remotely figure out what topic to tackle for “Dirty Fingernails.” Why? Because I was too busy recycling in my garden. So this is a “tidbit” column. Translated, that means incomplete sentences or I am going to claim a poetic license to dispense some worthy or useless ideas.

Ah, let me clarify the title, “Recycling in Your Garden.” On the other hand, maybe I should leave well enough alone as I actually do recycle the garden. I grow the plants, the plants rot, crack, get half eaten or half wasted, and I then feed them to the chickens. They get a gourmet meal and I get gourmet chicken poop, which goes back into my garden. Moving right along to the next topic.

Just so I don't have my underpants ripped off me, all the forthcoming information I either made up, will do, have done, or my friends told me to do it. So far, I have not found a website specifically highlighting these gems, although I suspect I am not the first to use any of these ideas. Thank you.

Tip 1. Last summer I finally noticed my 12 blueberry plants agreed to agree with the soil pH I had established. The blueberries were growing and the birds were zooming in. I was, not surprisingly, very unprepared for this raid but determined to also eat a few blueberries. Obviously I could have just covered each plant with bird netting but the birds get right through the netting if a berry is even slightly peeking through it. So...I took old tomato cages and turned them upside down with the pointed legs skyward. I then visualized my eyes being poked out by those up-in-the-air legs, so I slipped a small, clear plastic water bottle over each one. Not only did the bottles protect unaware eyeballs, but the wind gently moved them, twirling them around and scaring the birds away.

Tip 2. Way obvious, but just in case, if you are using a very large planter for anything that will not require the entire depth for root growth, such as a giant

Sequoia, fill the planter at least two-thirds up with non-dirt such as packing peanuts. This is useful, for example, if you want to use a large oak half-barrel for summer greens.

Tip 3. We use clear plastic shower curtains in our bathroom. It actually doesn't matter if you have little flying fish or Martians on the plastic curtains, this still works. Every so often I just give up trying to de-scum the plastic curtains. I need to get rid of them and away they go, right out to my garden for multiple uses: a cover for my compost pile, a cover for an emergency greenhouse, etc.

Tip 4. This is recycling at its finest. My old torn and tattered sleeping bag had at least one of the same privileges as my scummy shower curtain. It comforted my open compost bin. In case you are interested, one of my compost bins is a giant double milk sink from an old dairy, in which I raise red worms and make compost. Worm juice comes out the bottom hole when I open it. I had the shower curtain over the bin covering the decomposing compost. Then I put the sleeping bag on top of that and another scummy shower curtain on top of that. I made a kind of “sleeping bag sandwich.” A few weeks ago I lifted the layers to add some fresh kitchen compost and this comfy bed was teaming with big fat red worms, kept warm and happy throughout the winter because they were frost-, sleet- and snow-proofed. Amen.

Tip 5. You will be lucky if you can do this. Years ago, really about a half century ago, my small backyard looked like an empty city trash lot. I knew I could never clear it of weeds but did know about mulching to keep weeds down. At that time, folks were discarding their natural fiber (I am pretty sure it was hemp) rug pads. So I went around the city and collected them. I covered my entire backyard—no easy task—and had instant “perfect.” The plan was to squelch out the weeds, then lift the pads and find nice, wonderful soil teaming with earthworms. Not. Since the pads were a natural fiber, they decomposed, but not fast enough before the weeds below started growing up through them. At that point the pads could not be pulled up because they were anchored to China with deep, happy roots. So what to do? I mowed my pads and had an instant lawn. Several years later the pads must have deteriorated because I ended up with a magnificent, plantable garden. Lesson learned: Now I recycle large pieces of cardboard to smother out weeds.

Tip 6. This is a clumped-together tip. Use plastic bags and old panty hose as plant ties. Place dryer “fuzz” in the bottom of pots to keep the soil in and let the water flow through.

Tip “lucky 7”: I have not tried this yet, but here's a great idea: If you have any old, unused rain gutters, plant shallow-rooted vegetables or flowers in them. You can even mix and match, like radishes and pansies, or say, all petunias. Well, of course, don't take the rain gutters down from your roof—get it?

Tip 8. A friend was going to throw away several old wooden mop handles. I grabbed them and plan to paint them, then fasten them together for a plant teepee trellis. Any idea on the paint colors?

Tip 9. I have not done this, but read about it or someone told me about it (sorry to whoever that was since I can't remember), but it's a wonderful, whimsical idea. Take large plastic grocery or produce bags and fill them with soil. Then punch a few holes in the bottom and hang them somewhere like a clothesline or on a fence (I believe this was the suggestion) and plant a strawberry plant in each. Well, I think it's very “kitsch” adorable.

Tip 10. Use gray water. That is all I am going to say about that. Next time I write a column, if I remember, I will expand on this topic.

To paraphrase Thoreau, we are only as rich as the things we can live without.



Sioux Rogers--And the beet goes on.

