



Greener Garden Supplies

More and more people are choosing to garden organically. So it's somewhat troublesome that garden tools and supplies are often made of materials that are decidedly not environmentally friendly. Just try to find a composter, for instance, that's not made of a material like polyvinyl chloride (PVC). The wooden handles of garden tools and the fence and other materials we buy require trees, of course, to manufacture. And therein lies the gardener's dilemma: Must we contribute to environmental degradation in our quest to till the soil? The answer, happily, is no.

What to look for

It's not necessary—or even realistic—to avoid plastic and wood altogether when buying tools and supplies for the garden. In fact, the greenest gardeners search out recycled plastic products to support those companies who are actively saving plastic from its very long afterlife in landfill. And fortunately, recycled plastic garden products are becoming common.

Less readily available are sustainably sourced wood products for the garden, especially for small items such as hand tools. However, on many bigger-ticket items—when the amount of wood used really makes a difference—you will find the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) label, on fencing, lumber, and garden furniture, for instance. If you don't see the FSC label, ask for it. Sustainable wood will only succeed in the marketplace if consumers demand it.

Another label to look for is from the SmartWood's Rediscovered Wood Program, which certifies wood that would otherwise rot, get chipped up or be carted to a landfill. Log onto www.smartwood.org for product lists.

Materials from non-renewable sources may still be worth using if they're the lesser of evils. For instance, Stephanie Harris, long time president and a founder of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey recommends using row coverings for your vegetable garden bed even though the most widely available ones are made from polyester. The benefits of using floating row covers, she says, are 1) season extension with the protection of plants from frost 2) it forms a physical barrier between plant and pest, thereby reducing the amount of pesticide needed in the garden, and 3) provides for more even germination by preventing excessive water evaporation from the soil, reducing overall irrigation needs. It also protects seedlings from larger pests like rabbits, birds, and deer.

(From National Geographic's Green Guide for Everyday Living)