

Upcycling Nature's Leftovers

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It doesn't have to be a crafty DIY type to reuse garden debris in these simple outdoor projects.

One trellis I made from branches trimmed from an overgrown elderberry took "rustic" to almost professional levels, but my pea vines grew up its supports just the same. The trellis was completely functional and even survived the winter. My peas haven't sprouted yet this spring, but when I will train them up the trellis I made myself. It's easy to get intimidated browsing through garden catalogs or design books for garden ideas, but my awkward attempt at garden DIY proves that even the clumsiest person can upcycle nature's leftovers.

For most of these projects, new growth pruned from shrubs or trees work best. In my garden, elderberry, lilac, and cherry trees produce the long, straight branches that I need. Willows are a good source for pliable whips (very small, flexible pieces of wood pruned from new growth), but branches from many other shrubs and trees can work as well. Here are five things anyone can do with garden debris.



For the trellis for my peas, I buried two pairs of elderberry staves in an inverted V on opposite sides of a raised bed, tying them together with twine at the top. Then I tied a piece of wood on top like a ridge beam. I dug stakes into the ground where I wanted my vines, and ran twine over the beam. Voila! So easy, even I could do it. There are lots of other equally simple structures you could make. You could grow your vines around a teepee made of dried cornstalks or pruned branches. Another approach is to nail two branches into a T-shape and use stakes and twine to create a lean-to. For a more solid look, replace the twine with additional pruned branches.

If you're trying to save tender plants from frost, you don't need to be fancy. First make a simple teepee by tying four pieces of pruned branches together at one end (the size needed would be determined by the size of the area or plant to be covered). Stick the other end of the branches to the ground around the area to be kept warm, and wrap the structure in clear plastic. You can use the heavy plastic sold at hardware stores, or save drycleaning bags for the purpose. Floating row cover fabric is another good choice. For vegetable gardens that have already sprouted, you can bend whips into hoops that will lift row covers off of seedlings.

Markers

Sharpen stakes from pieces of pruned wood (about the thickness where hand pruners stop working). Using a vegetable peeler or utility knife, scrape the bark off of one side of the blunt end. Carve, paint, or write your label with marker on the exposed inner wood. Push the sharpened end into the ground near the plant you want to identify. For an even easier project, you can paint labels onto pieces

n terra cotta pots. Are all your pots in good condition? Save the rocks you find when you're digging in the garden and paint those.

id a lot of big rocks when you're digging in the garden, you can use them to edge your beds. If you have a lot of blow-down after a storm, or must remove a tree entirely, consider edging beds with small logs stuck on end (dig a trench as if for brick edging to help main standing); cover twice as much area by chopping the wood lengthwise and using half-logs. Or you can make the most of wood by slicing off "cookies" and using the disks as edging.

cent trip to Oregon, I saw a traditional willow-wood corral and realized that it would be easy to make a raised bed using the same idea. Instead of nailing 2x4s together to make the raised bed frame, simply insert pairs of stakes around the perimeter of the bed or small branches between them.

ant something that's more ornamental than structural, you can bend whips into rainbow shapes to create a scalloped edge around planting beds.

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of grinding out the stump of an old tree, carve it into an armchair. If that's too hard, smooth off the top for a perfect teddy bear's ble. Large logs can be leveled and turned on end to make stools for rustic garden seating. If you have the tools and your skills are more advanced--okay, a lot more advanced.

is to look at what you have and get creative. When you let your imagination go, the possibilities are unlimited, regardless of your skill. If you really get stuck, you can always search Pinterest for inspiration - just don't let what you see there intimidate you.

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I try to reuse and rethink a lot of things for use in the yard. Our horse fencing posts are reclaimed utility poles. I took the leftover ends that were varying lengths and created a plant stand for my small herbs in pots. I think it's cute!

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