

# LEISURE: DO-IT-YOURSELF, GARDENING

## the pleasure of creating and preserving

For some people, banging in a nail, mending a floorboard or painting a wall are leisure activities for whenever they have a few moments to spare. For others, hammering and sawing are daily obligations if they are to keep a roof over their heads and a decent home. The former buy their "do-it-yourself" (DIY) supplies; the latter pick them up in the street or use what nature provides. When it comes to gardening, the disparity is the same: hoeing, planting and watering can be a pleasant hobby or a means to feed a family. In developed countries, arts and crafts are all the rage and gardening has become a popular and rewarding physical activity. However, recreational DIY and gardening pose problems from an environmental point of view, including wastefulness, water pollution, overexploitation of forests and waste treatment and disposal. For the past few years, green products, good practices and natural materials have meant that Sunday gardeners and DIY enthusiasts can enjoy their favourite pastimes while preserving nature.

### IMPACTS

#### Sanitary risks

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are released by numerous solvent-based products such as paints, varnishes and adhesives. Certain materials used in construction, decoration and furniture manufacturing give off VOCs too. They are also used to clean brushes and rollers. While the products that contain them give off a strong smell, the VOCs themselves are often odourless. Meanwhile their toxic emanations persist for months, even years. A serious health risk, VOCs cause irritations, allergies, asthma, neurological damage and even cancer, as do certain gardening products.

[www.epa.gov/iaq/voc.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/voc.html)

[www.healthhouse.org/iaq/default.asp](http://www.healthhouse.org/iaq/default.asp)

[www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Air\\_Quality/Older/VOCs.html](http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Air_Quality/Older/VOCs.html)

#### Tropical deforestation

Used equally for hardwood floors, in construction and to manufacture furniture, more and more teak, mahogany and rosewood are finding their way into DIY stores. These inexpensive tropical woods are the object of uncontrolled logging. Subjected to industrial production imperatives, which often fail to respect the forest's natural riches or legislation, their numbers are dwindling at an alarming rate. Each year, 14.2 million hectares of tropical forest disappear – the equivalent of all France's forestland – depriving indigenous populations and native fauna of vital resources.

[www.fao.org/DOCREP/ARTICLE/WFC/XII/MS12A-E.htm](http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/ARTICLE/WFC/XII/MS12A-E.htm)

#### Water pollution

People frequently use fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides on their garden or vegetable patch. Through leaching and runoff, phosphates and nitrates from agriculture and domestic gardening become concentrated in water bodies, creating the conditions for eutrophication. The subsequent proliferation of algae asphyxiates the milieu and deprives other species of oxygen.

[www.epa.gov/maia/html/eutroph.html](http://www.epa.gov/maia/html/eutroph.html)

#### Uniform species

In western countries, private gardens are often bordered by hedges. Despite the multitude of possibilities, a dozen or so hedge species prevail. They are chosen because they offer privacy, shelter from the wind, require minimal care and attention, and stay green all year round. These uniform plantations can deplete the soil of nutrients and disturb local fauna. This lack of diversity is repeated in the garden itself, with the same few species of flowers, trees and shrubs being grown from one to the next. Such standardization is the work of landscape designers and nurseries, which stock too few local species. Instead they sell invasive exotic plants that are often unsuited to the climate in much the same way as lawns are unsuited to hot, dry regions.

A POPULAR WAY TO GET RID OF GARDEN RUBBISH, GRASS AND BULKY WASTE, BONFIRES CONTRIBUTE TO AIR POLLUTION.



→ 1/4  
of surface and groundwater pollution comes from amateur gardening



↓ Importing exotic plants can disturb the local ecosystem by introducing invasive insects.

CHILDREN WHO ARE EXPOSED TO PESTICIDES ARE 6 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO CONTRACT LEUKAEMIA.

#### PESTICIDES

Products containing biocides will destroy weeds, parasites and diseases for an impeccable garden. Some will also kill birds, hedgehogs, bees, ladybirds, butterflies and other non-target species. Meanwhile, undesirable insects are becoming increasingly resistant to pesticides.

[www.ffdp.ca/hww2.asp?cid=4&id=230](http://www.ffdp.ca/hww2.asp?cid=4&id=230)



→ 50%  
of exploitation of tropical forests is illegal



↓ "Dangerous", "corrosive", "irritant" and "inflammable" are adjectives that describe the majority of DIY products. Taking precautions when handling them will help prevent poisoning and accidents among both users and children.

## ON THE RIGHT TRACK

### → Family allotments

Plots of land developed by associations, social housing projects or local authorities, allotments and community gardens are found near housing developments or on the outskirts of cities for residents to use and enjoy. Vegetables account for most of what they grow there. Urban policymakers at every level now acknowledge the role of allotments in reinforcing the social fabric. First in line for these gardens are large families and the very poor. They rekindle community spirit and neighbourliness, create green areas in the city, and ease social tensions.

[mindspring.com/~communitygardens](http://mindspring.com/~communitygardens)  
[www.cityfarmer.org/erin.html](http://www.cityfarmer.org/erin.html)  
[www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/ari.html](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/ari.html)



### → The FSC label (Forest Stewardship Council)

Naturally ecological, wood is an essential material when building and furnishing houses. However, it is only renewable when responsible forest management preserves biological diversity and the forest's capacity to regenerate itself. To prevent resources from being plundered, FSC certification guarantees economically viable forest management that respects the environment and the rights of local populations. Worldwide almost 40 million hectares in some sixty countries have been granted certification. For example, all Britain's public forests are FSC-certified. The FSC label can be found on a variety of products including furniture, paper and charcoal.

[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)



### → Recycling in developing countries

In Africa as in all developing countries, there is no limit to the inventiveness shown in recovering and reusing materials. Countless decorative and useful objects (toy cars, briefcases, ashtrays) and furniture (tables, stools, CD racks) are crafted out of metal recovered from tins, drink cans and aerosols. Equally resourceful are mats woven from plastic bags and chairs made out of barrels. As more and more people in the North are seduced by these creations, handcrafting from recycled materials is growing into a full-fledged business.

[www.sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/art.html](http://www.sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/art.html)



## AT UNEP

### → UNEP AND THE BASEL CONVENTION

The Basel Convention was adopted in 1989 by the international community and ratified by 145 member states of the United Nations, and by the European Union. The purpose of this world agreement is to provide a solution to the problem of hazardous waste disposal. In particular it aims to regulate the movement of almost 4 million tonnes of toxic waste that move across international frontiers each year, and which include pesticides. The Secretariat of the Convention, administered by UNEP, is tasked with implementing the convention and the agreements made under it. The promotion of less toxic products and sustainable alternatives, supporting projects to eliminate stocks of pesticides and information campaigns are among its main actions.

[www.basel.int](http://www.basel.int)

### SOME LABELS

#### European Eco-label



Created in 1993 by the ministers of the environment in the European Union countries, the European Eco-label, symbolized by a flower, is awarded to products that are not detrimental to the environment during their lifecycle, from the extraction of raw materials to elimination of waste. It can be found on numerous consumer goods such as paper, textiles, detergents and paints throughout the European Union.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ecolabel/pdf/infokit/diy\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ecolabel/pdf/infokit/diy_en.pdf)

Some national eco-labels certify products that have a reduced environmental impact during their lifecycle and whose effectiveness is at least equivalent to that of similar products. Examples include:

→ Der Blaue Engel, set up in 1977 by the German federal ministry of the interior and the ministry of the environment: [www.blauer-engel.de](http://www.blauer-engel.de)

→ NF-Environnement, the French eco-label created in 1991 and awarded by the national organization for standardization: [www.afnor.fr](http://www.afnor.fr)

→ Environmental Choice, introduced by the New Zealand government in 1990: [www.enviro-choice.org.nz](http://www.enviro-choice.org.nz)

→ The Thai Green Label Scheme, created in 1994 by the Thailand Environment Institute in conjunction with the ministry of industry: [www.tei.or.th/bep/GI\\_home.htm](http://www.tei.or.th/bep/GI_home.htm)

### PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

#### Gardening

→ REPLACE CHEMICAL PRODUCTS WITH NATURAL ALTERNATIVES → PREFER HOME-MADE COMPOST (SEE WEBSITES) → BUY FROM SPECIALIST RETAILERS WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO GIVE RELIABLE ADVICE → PREFER CERTIFIED PRODUCTS THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH ORGANIC GARDENING → READ LABELS CAREFULLY AND FOLLOW RECOMMENDATIONS (DOSAGE PER SQUARE METRE OF GARDEN, INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE, ETC.) → WATER ECONOMICALLY AND EFFICIENTLY WITH THE WEATHER: SAVE RAINWATER AND IN SUMMER LET THE GARDEN COOL OFF BEFORE WATERING (NEVER WATER IN THE SUN) → CHOOSE DIFFERENT LOCAL PLANT SPECIES FOR THE GARDEN AND FOR HEDGES → PUT NESTING BOXES IN TREES

#### Diy

→ BUY ECOLOGICALLY-CERTIFIED PRODUCTS → USE WATER-BASED PAINTS → NEVER POUR LEFTOVER PRODUCTS DOWN THE DRAIN: TAKE THEM TO WASTE-COLLECTION SITES ALONG WITH THE EMPTY CONTAINERS → AVOID SYNTHETIC CARPETS AND INSULATION MATERIALS → PREFER NATURAL FIBRES SUCH AS SISAL, COIR AND HEMP → CHECK THE ORIGIN OF WOOD AND CHOOSE LOCAL SPECIES → RECYCLE AND REPAIR → GIVE NEW LIFE TO FLEA-MARKET FURNITURE

#### Companies and local authorities

→ SET ASIDE LAND FOR ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS → CHOOSE PRODUCTS CAREFULLY AND MONITOR THE AMOUNT USED → PLANT NATIVE TREES THAT ARE SUITED TO THE CLIMATE → INSTALL AN EFFICIENT WATERING SYSTEM

### FIND OUT MORE

#### Organic gardening tips:

[www.basic-info-4-organic-fertilizers.com/gardeningtips.html](http://www.basic-info-4-organic-fertilizers.com/gardeningtips.html)

[www.organicgarden.org.uk](http://www.organicgarden.org.uk)

[www.cityfarmer.org](http://www.cityfarmer.org)

[www.goforgreen.ca/gardening/Factsheets/Fact2.htm](http://www.goforgreen.ca/gardening/Factsheets/Fact2.htm)

[www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency/final\\_final.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency/final_final.pdf)

#### DIY ideas:

[www.dijynet.com](http://www.dijynet.com)