

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

- by [E. A. Zimmerman](#)

Also see Part I - [How We Became a Throw-away Society](#)

Some individuals and organizations are choosing not to be part of a "throwaway society." Instead of disposing of items like electronics and 1950's furniture, [Oak Ridge National Laboratory's property sales group](#) auctions them. While older computer equipment may become too dated for use in a high-tech research organization, it can still have value to small businesses or schools facing a budget crunch. The Laboratory was even able to sell a 4800 lb. slab of concrete to a local man who used it for a patio. Closer to home, [Orange Art](#), a wholesaler of art and stationary in Woodstock, re-uses Styrofoam peanuts and boxes when shipping their products.

Individuals who want to waste less also have many options. To start with, **avoid generating trash in the first place.** Bring your own bags when you go shopping. According to an Ikea spokesperson, the average person uses 1,500 plastic shopping bags a year. Buy in bulk when possible. Single-serving items require more packaging. If you go to an office party, bring your own washable plate, silverware and mug. Buy things that can be reused over and over, like rechargeable batteries. Clean counters with a cloth towel instead of disposable paper towels. Ask whether your delivery person will take back the plastic bags that newspapers come in.

Fix it if you can. Although he must endure a bit of taunting from neighbors for driving a "rust bucket," my husband takes a certain pride in keeping his old jalopies on the road.

Sell it. People collect all kinds of things, from milk bottles to spark plugs, Barbie dolls, hideous lamps, and barbed wire. Many go through eBay, which started up in 1995, and now has 276 million users around the world trading millions of items in 50,000 categories. The very first thing ever sold on eBay was a broken laser pointer for \$14.83 (to a broken laser pointer collector.) A private jet went for \$4,900,000. Anyone with a computer can easily sell unwanted CDs, DVDs, books and other items on Amazon.com. Both sites charge sellers a fee. Of course, there is always the good old-fashioned yard/tag/rummage sale. Divest yourself of clutter while making some spending cash. One person's trash truly may be another person's treasure.



Owners of a car like this don't lose sleep over scratches (or hoofprints.) Photo by Bet Zimmerman.

Give it away. Freecycle.org is an example of an InterNetwork created to divert waste from landfills. Their goal is to "help instill a sense of generosity of spirit while strengthening local community ties and promoting environmental sustainability and reuse." Freecycle's 1.6 million members offer, ask for and receive free items through online forums. The weekly ReminderNews has a "Good Neighbor" section where folks can request items they need, and respond to requests. The Town of Woodstock [transfer station](#) has a "take it or leave it" shed (which we fondly refer to as The Crap Shack), where transfer station permit holders can leave useful items for others, or take what they need.

Recycle. In order to keep up with increasing volumes of waste, Connecticut will need to almost double its recycling rate. Currently, 70% of our solid waste ends up being burned in trash-to-energy plants or buried. The law requires all residents to recycle glass, plastic, metal and paper, and other items. Recycling does not have to end there. Leftover lumber can become a birdhouse. Lisa Davidson of Woodstock freezes vegetable scraps like the ends of carrots in a plastic bag to make soup stock. Others compost food waste

(except for animal products like meat which can attract varmints), leaves and grass clippings. Coffee grounds will help make a garden grow.

Buy products with recycled content. This reduces waste while creating market demand for recycled feedstock. Every little bit helps. And don't forget to recycle this newspaper when you're done.

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