

Don't buy... DI

Hands up if your resources budget just does not stretch far enough. Follow our do-it-yourself guide to resourcing your setting using all sorts of recycled materials

While we teach children about the value of recycling, do we always practice what we preach? We can forget how easy it can be to find and make things for our setting that look good and last well.

The following ideas are designed to encourage you, as practitioners, to consider alternatives to buying new resources. Once you try a few, you will quickly come up with more ideas of your own – and once you get

the children and their families interested in the project, you will find that everyone will have new ideas. Consider holding a recycling week, or appointing someone to take responsibility for gathering and sharing recycling ideas.

Try to look beyond the setting and encourage a range of local people to get involved – you will find that if you think about your wider community, the wider community will think of you!



Mum, there's an elephant in my milk!

The handles on plastic milk bottles may be there to help us lift them out of the fridge, but take a closer look at the curving shape – that is not a handle, it is an elephant's trunk! Ask the children to bring in plastic milk bottles from home, wash them thoroughly and help them to carefully cut them just below the level of the bottom of the handle (see photograph 1). The handle now resembles the elephant's trunk while the bottle will become its body. Suggest that the children add semicircles of card to make the ears.

Encourage the children to cover the surface of the bottle with newspaper and paste or PVA glue (see photograph 2).

Leave it to dry, then suggest that they paint it or add a layer of coloured tissue paper.

The examples shown in photograph 3 are painted grey (mix several colours with white rather than just black to make grey), however, the children may tell you that elephants do not have to be grey – they can be whatever colour they like.



Elephants never forget... that recycling can be fun!

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Milk bottles to paint pots

Before you start to worry about your setting becoming littered with the remains of dozens of milk bottles, consider how useful the remaining – non-elephant – part of the bottle could be. Why not use the bottoms of the bottles to make paint palettes? They are small enough to fit into the trays beneath easels, and stable enough to stand on tables without the risk of being knocked over.

Card times

Card is one material that is expensive to buy, yet we use it in great quantities. There are various ways that card can be recycled in the setting and you could start by trying the following two ideas:

- Greetings cards, especially those designed for children, can easily be converted into certificates to reward good behaviour. Invite the children to cut around the illustrations on the cards, then use them to design their own collages. The text can be handwritten or word-processed, printed on to paper and added to the card.

- Shoeboxes offer children exciting opportunities to create their own miniature worlds. Let them experiment with pasting in photographs of family, friends or favourite places to make a personalised environment, and draw portraits and figures on to scrap pieces of card and add them to the scene. Other cardboard boxes, particularly eggboxes, can form useful starting-points for sculptures.

Sharing stories

Taking advantage of opportunities to pair younger children with older children can reap great rewards. Older children enjoy writing stories and making books for younger readers. Establish paired reading sessions in which the children can share the stories that they have written for their reading partners. Ask the older children to

scribe stories imagined by the younger ones and to incorporate their illustrations into the tales.

Most copies of children's picture books eventually pass their sell-by date and need to be thrown away. Rescue the illustrations from the book and incorporate them into worksheets for older children. These can be filed away as a resource for other practitioners or wet playtimes.

Involving families

Parents are a great free resource. Many will have specific skills that the children will want to learn, for example, traditional skills such as cooking or sewing, or craft-based skills such as fabric printing. Invite mums and dads to run after-school clubs or one-

off workshops in which these skills can be shared with the children.

Some of the children from minority ethnic families may make trips to their home country. Encourage them to return with artefacts that the rest of the group will find interesting. Artefacts need not be expensive or elaborate – a comic published in a language spoken by one or two of the children can still be enjoyed by the whole group.

Ask parents to bring any toys that their children have grown out of to the setting. These can often be arranged into sets designed to accompany particular reading books, for example, a set of plastic animals could be packaged into a folder containing a copy of *Dear Zoo*.

Home corners often need frequent rejuvenation to keep the children interested.



Mixing up resources – bottoms of plastic milk bottles make sturdy paint palettes

Dressing-up clothes donated by families will easily enhance the area.

Material world

The local community is likely to be your best resource. Many retailers and businesses will be happy to be associated with a local school or early years setting and will be pleased to help – particularly if you can reward them with some good publicity. Anything from piles of paper to office chairs could come your way as a result of developing links in this area.

Local frame shops may be happy to provide your setting with card mounts that are a little too grubby to use in the shop, which will add a touch of class to a display of the children's artwork. Fabric shops may provide a collection of offcuts.

Tear away old backing paper from walls carefully, as this can result in a valuable source of material for collage activities.

Finally, if you are considering what to buy your grandmother for Christmas, look no further than a calendar featuring artists' work that you think would appeal, not only to her, but also to the children. Write 'Please can I have this back now?' on 31 December, then you will have a collection of images that can be laminated and used to inspire the children's own artwork. ■

