

Eco-tip for 5-5-19

Making it Last: Extending Product Life to Reduce Waste

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

An adage of conservation says, “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” That bit of frugal advice saves resources, but it can also lead to a house full of ugly furniture, uncomfortable clothing, and other inconveniences if you insist on keeping everything until it becomes unserviceable. Instead, local experts can tell you how you how to upgrade while still conserving resources.

Wood furniture: Refinishing wood furniture is a dirty job, involving fumes from chemicals used for stripping layers of old shellac, lacquer, varnish and stain, so this repair is often left to professional companies with commercial venting. However, Steve Berry, owner of Wood Reviver in Simi Valley, acknowledges some wood furniture can be simply refreshed or repaired rather than fully refinished. With YouTube “how-to” video research and hard work, do-it-yourselfers can sand down scratched areas, apply new stain, buff surfaces and fill in holes and scratches with fill sticks, putty pencils, or repair pens. Sometimes, wood soaps and oils designed for wood furniture can also make a big improvement.

Particle board furniture: Particle board typically does not last long, but Lori Jacobs, of Thousand Oaks, a reader of this column, emailed me a link to an on-line “IKEA Hackers” (www.ikeahackers.net) group where innovators post creative ways to upcycle old furniture. Some ideas are elaborate, such as one posted by a decorator who used an angle grinder and an oxidizer to customize metal plates for recovering a chest of drawers.

Shoes: Re-heeling and re-soling shoes are staples of Luis Vallenueva’s The Shoe Doctor in Meiners Oaks, but he also has another tool for keeping people happy with their shoes. He sells insoles (fifteen dollars) in the store, and he also has a book from which people can order orthotic inserts. For athletes and hikers, the Superfeet brand of orthotic insert is available at REI in Oxnard for about fifty dollars.

Mattresses: A “comfort layer” is like an orthotic for your mattress. If your mattress has become lumpy, too hard, too soft, or too contoured to the heavy spots of your body, a comfort layer can extend the life of your mattress. Spencer Simcik, owner of Spencer’s Mattress in Ventura, uses natural latex to manufacture these inserts for insertion between customers’ mattresses and mattress covers, saying, “It gives you the opportunity to make a new impression on your mattress.”

Hair Brushes: If you wait to clean your hair brush until hair is wrapped around every bristle and residue begins to form, you may have a daunting task ahead. Caitlin Burnett, a stylist

at Willem Hair Design in Camarillo, advises making your brush last longer by regularly removing hair from it with a rat tail comb. To make removal easier, fill a bowl with warm water and shampoo, immerse the brush in the water, let it dry, and then use scissors to cut clumps of hair from both sides.

Cast iron pots and pans: Cast iron cookware is durable, but Elizabeth – per company policy she gives no last name – Floor Lead of Sur La Table in Thousand Oaks, says unless cast iron is coated with enamel, it must be pre-seasoned and properly cleaned after each use to maintain surfaces. Seasoning is a process involving treating with vegetable oil and baking. Cleaning, she advises, should use salt, rather than detergent. Never soak cast iron in water or put it in a dishwasher. www.eatthis.com recommends removing rust with a non-metallic scrubber and dish soap.

Nonstick Cookware: Elizabeth advises avoiding sprays, such as vegetable oil spray, on any cookware, including nonstick surfaces. The web page of Anolon, a manufacturer of nonstick cookware, concurs, noting sprays are made not just from vegetable oil, but also from emulsifiers, anti-foaming agents, and propellants, some of which build up and stick to food, voiding Anolon's warranty. Other advice: avoid high heat, don't scrub with an abrasive sponge, and avoid contact with metal.

When you buy a product, ask local experts how to make it last.