## A New Use for Old Tires

There are mountains of old tires out there. Americans keep on rolling and tires keep on wearing out. Every year there is almost one scrap tire created for every man, woman, and child in the United States. In 2001 alone, Americans discarded nearly 281 million tires, weighing some 5.7 million tons. There is no appreciable risk in using recycled tires in the vegetable garden. Rubber tires do contain minute amounts of certain heavy metals, but they are tightly bound within the rubber compound and do not leach into the soil. One of the ingredients in the rubber recipe is zinc. Zinc, in fact, is an essential plant element. Tires are durable. The very qualities that make them an environmental headache (they don’t decompose0 make them perfect for our uses in the garden. All of those old treads can provide a lot of good growing space, and master gardeners are just the people to put them to use. Below we’ve highlighted just a few ways to recycle old tires and literally reap the benefits. If you like an idea, you’ll just need to do some research to get more detail.

* **Raising the roots:** Grow your plants in raised beds made of tires. When the soil is elevated, it warms faster. It dries out more quickly. It provides deeper soil for root crops to develop. You can plant earlier in the season and get your plants off to a healthier and earlier start. You can harvest later into the fall.
* **Jump-start your tomatoes:** You can get a jump on the spring growing season by creating a mini-greenhouse, of sorts, for a few tomato plants. Once you have a stack or two of tires in place, set your tomato plants in each stack. Next, place a wire hoop or tomato cage in place around the plant. Cover the cage with clear plastic and secure it with duct tape, twine, etc.
* **Tire compost bin:** You can turn used tires into a good compost bin.
* **Potato stacks:** Plant a vertical potato patch. If you are limited in space, then this method is especially beneficial. You can grow a nice crop of spuds in just a few tires.
* **Great walls of tires:** You can use tires to create retaining walls to stabilize an earth bank.
* **All-terrain planters:** Try using old tires from riding mowers and all-terrain-vehicles (ATVs) for planters. You can use them on the deck, porch, or patio, with peppers, flowers, herbs, and other compact plants.
* **Tiers of tires:** You can make another type of planter for small spaces by stacking four tires of different sizes into a sort of pyramid. Begin with one each of the following sized tires: A farm tractor tire; a tire from a large truck; an automobile tire; and an ATV tire.

Using old tires is a great way to recycle. It’s also a wonderful way to make the most of a small garden plot and generally increase your garden yield. Try some of these ideas. Get great results and save the environment

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