

A beginners' guide to mindful crafting

Community craft groups were mindful of how and what materials they used, long before 'sustainability', 'eco-friendly', or 'green' made their way into our vocabulary. Yet their sustainable practices have often been overlooked.

Our new report [Crafting Sustainable Communities](#) celebrates the role of community craft in working towards a more sustainable society. And in this toolkit we offer guidance for individuals and groups on crafting sustainably.

Looking at the big picture

- **Don't get too caught up in the language.** 'Eco-friendly', 'green', 'sustainable', 'circular' – there are many words to describe actions that we take because we care about the environment. It's easy to get caught up in the debate over which term fits best but don't let it put you off. Actions always beat words!
- **Zero in on what you can control.** Brainstorm what worries you about climate change and then boil that down to actions you or your group can reasonably take. The impact of climate change on the planet and its peoples can't be changed overnight by just one person or group, but all our contributions put together make a real difference.
- **Forge networks for inspiration and support.** Change doesn't happen overnight, a fact that can sometimes be demoralising if you feel like you're going it alone. Running or participating in a community craft group that works sustainably can connect you to others who share your interests and values.
- **Find and share stories.** Reaching out to other like-minded groups in your immediate community or beyond for support can also be invaluable. Hearing about others' sustainability successes and failures (and sharing your own) can help build the sense you're all working towards something together.



Now for something more practical . . .

- **Know what you already have and know what you want.** Making the best use of what you already own is a lot easier if you know exactly what you have, on both a personal and organisational level. So why not do an inventory of your resources, and keep it up-to-date? When ideas come to you about how you could use a certain material or what items you'd like, write them down. Combine these inventories and brainstorm for some mindful making!
- **Be mindful of how you access materials and tools.** Many factors affect what's accessible to people when it comes to yarn, fabric, and tools. Try 'shopping' your own stash, repurposing items you love but no longer use as they are, visiting scrap stores, looking in local charity shops, or organising swaps with friends.
- **Make and mend with intention.** Not everything we make has to be 'functional': we can make something just because it's beautiful or because we want to practice. Still, think about what that item can do for you or somebody else. If you're learning new stitches, could you practise on fabric or items that can be used or displayed later?
- **Craft for good causes.** Plenty of charities issue calls for crafters to put their skills to good use, whether you're a keen knitter, crocheter, or sewist. Places like theatres or hospitals also call on their communities to get crafting. Search for these calls online or keep an eye on local notice boards.

Remember, what sustainable craft looks like changes from person to person and group to group. Think about what's right for your circumstances based on things like money, space, time, and energy. Above all, remember that amateur activity is a powerful force for environmental good, so keep up the good work!



Giving items a second life . . .

Very small scraps of fabric...	...could be used as stuffing for soft toys or cushion inserts. Keep a scrap bag on hand when you're making, and tidy as you go.
A duvet cover...	...could be made into an item of clothing, or pillow cases.
Denim items like jeans...	...could be cut up and used to reupholster furniture.
Something cashmere that's no longer wearable as is...	...could be made into a baby's hat or fingerless gloves.
Small amounts of sturdy fabrics...	...could be used to make bowl or mug cosies, bow ties for pets, or storage baskets.
An old quilt or throw...	...could be cut up to make a jacket or bag.
Something knitted or crocheted that's past mending...	...could be taken apart and the yarn reused for something else.
Unused knitting needles...	...could be wrapped in yarn and made into decorations, topped with crocheted flower heads, or hearts.
Curtains, blankets, and duvet covers...	...are great sources of larger bolts of fabric. Check your own cupboards or head to your local charity shop or scrap store.
Food scraps...	...can become natural dyes to colour clothing and textiles. To name just a few, avocado pits, onion skins, celery leaves, tea and coffee can create a rainbow of colour.
Mending something...	...doesn't have to be perfect or invisible. Try some visible mending, where repairs are meant to be seen, using techniques like sashiko or embroidery.



Resources



Places to watch, learn and shop

- Looking to sustainably source materials? Use [this directory](#) from ReusefulUK to point you to your local scrap store. Or keep an eye out for materials for sale on charity websites like British Heart Foundation ([arts and crafts](#); [sewing machines and haberdashery](#)) or Oxfam ([sewing, knitting and haberdashery](#)).
- YouTube is, of course, a great resource of information and how-tos. [Here's one on sashiko](#), a stitching technique from Japan that many people use for repairing textiles; or try embroidering over any faults with something decorative like [this little heart](#). Or give altering your clothes a go with the help of Remake, whether you're looking to [take in seams](#), [make garments bigger](#), or even just [sew on a button](#).
- Plenty of upcycling how-tos exist: searching for what you have, or what you want to make, and 'upcycle' or 'recycle' will surely bring up plenty of results. Or check out a beginners' guide from sites like [The Sewing Directory](#) and [Prima](#) to get inspired.
- Interested in reading more about clothing and textiles, craft, climate change, sustainability, and the relationship between these?
 - *Consumed: The need for collective change; colonialism, climate change & consumption* by Aja Barber
 - *How To Break Up With Fast Fashion: A guilt-free guide to changing the way you shop – for good* by Lauren Bravo
 - *Loved Clothes Last: How the Joy of Rewearing and Repairing Your Clothes Can Be a Revolutionary Act* by Orsola de Castro
 - *Less: Stop Buying So Much Rubbish: How Having Fewer, Better Things Can Make Us Happier* by Patrick Grant
 - *Mending Life: A Handbook for Repairing Clothes and Hearts* by Nina and Sonya Montenegro

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