

Eco cheap

As far as eco goes, the UAE is getting better at it. While Ski Dubai may still be trudging its carbon boots all over the emirate, we're all about recycled paper towels and chowing down on organic fodder. But, tired of paying over and beyond for going green, **Anna Whitehouse** joins forces with **Danny Seo**, author of the Simply Green book series to bring you 15 ways to befriend Mother Nature for less.

1. Cork mats

All you need to do is collect about 50 corks, stand them upright and arrange into a tight circle. To keep them together, surround the collection with an eight to ten inch metal hose clamp (sold in the plumbing section at ACE Hardware). Tighten the clamp to bind the corks together and trim the excess with metal clippers. Job done.

Cost: approximately Dhs21



2. Glass containers

Worryingly, plastic food containers can break down and leach chemicals into food. Reusable, durable lidded glass ones, like Ikea's 365+ line are the safe way to go - both for your family and the planet. Use them to store leftovers or dry good like pasta and beans. Ikea, www.ikea.com.

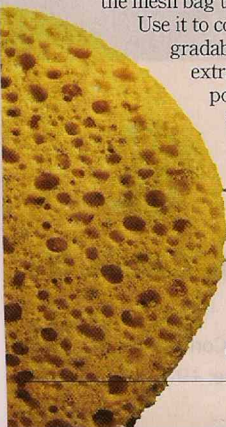
Cost: from Dhs28

3. Super sponges

If you pick up a bag of citrus fruits (oranges, lemons and clementines usually do the trick) then hang onto the mesh bag they come in.

Use it to cover a bio-degradable sponge for extra scrubbing power. Just pop the sponge in the bag and tie the ends tightly and voila! It even adds a bit of longevity to the sponge's life.

Cost: Dhs0



4. Sandwich tray

If you've ever succumbed to tea at the Burj Al Arab, you'll be aware of the tiered trays the cucumber sandwiches arrive on. To make a slightly quirky version, just rummage around for some mismatched dinnerware sets (you'll need three plates and three small cups) and alternate the three, gluing as you go. To avoid using excess glue, apply only to the rim and bottom of the cup, rather than the plate.

Cost: approximately Dhs14

6. T-shirt cushions

If feng shui expert Shivani Adalja has anything to do with it, she reckons clearing out old clothes annually is a must (it balances our chi apparently).

So, instead of chucking clothes away, make them into something useful. Cut two identical squares of fabric from an old T-shirt (one from the front and one from the back) and lay the squares on top of each other. If you don't sew - and I don't - you can take the cut pieces to a dry cleaner or tailor and have them make basic stitches for you, suggests Seo. Otherwise sew the pieces together along three edges, turn the pillow inside out and stuff with pillow filling. The just sew it shut.

Cost: approximately Dhs10

5. Home remedies

Got the AC flu? Pick up some eucalyptus from the Organic Food & Café and hang it from your shower rail. 'The heat and steam help to activate the herbs essential oils, which can ease congestion,' Seo explains. Hang a bunch with natural garden twine (it's more durable than cotton) and it should keep working for a few weeks.

Cost: approximately Dhs35



7. Sweater chairs

If you've got some chunky knit sweaters hanging about (and let's face it, we all have the odd one despite Dubai's steambath climes), then start snipping. Work up the side seams, trimming the neck hole and sleeves as you go, leaving two squares of fabric slightly larger than the seat of a chair. Unscrew the seat cushions from the chairs, cover the cushions in fabric and secure with a staple gun or small tacks.

Cost: Dhs0



8. Shirt napkins

'The softer and more worn the better,' says Seo, explaining that old shirts make perfect napkins. Faded plaids and check patterns look especially great. All you have to do is cut the old shirts (after a good wash) into similar sized pieces, about 12 inches square. Then just sew up the hem.

Cost: Dhs0

9. Newspaper pencils

Stop the rainforest carnage and pick up some pencils made out of recycled newspaper from www.treesmart.com.

Cost: Dhs70 for a pack of 48

10. Clutter baskets

Gather all your bathroom essentials (make-up, moisturisers, toners and the rest) into a woven basket made of sustainable water hyacinth and rattan fibres. Go to www.createandbarrel.com.

Cost: from Dhs63

11. Bamboo cloths

Don't think bamboo is just an eco replacement for wood... fabric woven from its fibres is equally as green, absorbent and naturally antibacterial, making it ideal for wash cloths. Go to www.vitaterra.com

Cost: from Dhs28



15. Bag dryer

Sandwich and freezer bags can withstand a couple of washes assures Seo. Just insert chopsticks into an old toothbrush holder and hang the bags after being washed in soapy water.

Cost: approximately Dhs21

12. Excess candles

If you've got half a dozen semi-burned candles knocking about, melt them down and pour into old flowerpots. Use a dirham coin to cover the drainage hole and insert a wick made out of cotton twine. Loosely tie the wick to a pencil and lay across the pot. Pour the liquid wax into the pot and allow to set.



13. Recycled bowls

If you recycle bottles (and it's getting easier in Dubai), then why not buy some bowls made from the stuff? We love the green tint of the ones at www.catalog.com.

Cost: Dhs84 for four

14. Glass centrepiece

Gather all the odd jars and glasses you have hanging about your cupboards on a tray and decorate with leaves and flowers. 'In quantity, simple vessels can look so dramatic,' says Seo.

Cost: Dhs0

The Simply Green book series by Danny Seo is available at www.amazon.com from Dhs21.