



GREEN UP » words SUE WHITE photography BIGSTOCK & ISTOCK

Your toybox

Less is more when it comes to saving the planet and kids' toys.

TIP 1 PLASTIC IS NOT FANTASTIC

As BPA's, phthalates and lead paint increasingly come under question from health experts, plastic toys may be on the way out for more than their impact on the planet. Melinda Brito, Founder of Australia's Eco Toys, says toy buyers are slowly becoming more discerning. "Particularly in the past few years when there have been so many toy recalls and reports of high levels of lead in toys," she says.

So how do you choose green? Melinda adds "Choose items made from natural, sustainable, renewable and recycled materials, or organic cottons and look for certifications such as FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). It's also good to support Australian made." www.ecotoys.com.au



Clockwise from right: Simple things such as loo rolls and cardboard boxes amuse beyond belief.

TIP 4 MAKE IT REAL

To keep playtime creative, try to avoid too much focus on electronic items requiring an endless supply of batteries. As Adelaide mum-of-two Sharelle Hart quickly discovered, her two-year-old is most entertained by games he creates himself. "He loves unpacking the shopping and looking at all the different things inside," she says. "His absolute favourite is to run off with the toilet roll packet, rip it open and build towers by stacking the rolls and knocking them down. The recycling box is a huge source of fun as well."



development and provide just the right toys, puzzles and games for each stage," says Mary Glen of Toy Libraries Victoria. "It's also greener and provides variety in their children's play."

www.toylibraries.org.au



name; and consider the likely link between rock-bottom prices and exploitation (of people or a piece of the planet). Given that current certification on ethical toys is severely lacking, Choice suggests supporting lobbyists such as Amnesty International or Oxfam. www.oxfam.org.au, www.amnesty.org.au

TIP 2 THINK BIG The toy industry is a complex beast, as *Choice* magazine showed in 2008 when attempting to survey members on the ethics of toy making. Of the 61 companies *Choice* approached, a staggering 72 per cent rebuffed the request. Survey readers soon realise if you want to support ethical, and by extension eco, toys, you'll need to be a proactive consumer: avoid toys that don't disclose the manufacturer's

TIP 3 LOAN IT, DON'T OWN IT With hundreds of toy libraries across Australia, it's now getting increasingly easier for parents to replenish the toybox weekly without costing their wallet or the planet. Toy libraries often are attached to traditional (aka book-filled) libraries and offer the same fantastic, cheap-as-chips service.

"Quality educational toys are expensive, so toy libraries can help parents find out about their child's

TIP 5 LESS IS MORE When it comes to the planet and kids' toys, less is usually more. It's easy to say and harder to do, but if your child's toybox is already overflowing, try gradually sneaking away unused toys one at a time; you can reintroduce them as "new" down the track. Remember to make use of what you have: big boxes make great cubbies, while small ones are fabulous for the art and crafts corner. If friends and family don't get your quest to cut down the excess, start insisting on books, not toys, as presents. GL