

Useful Re-Using - Builder's Bags



At Windmill Community Gardens, we are very fond of using builder's bags for new uses. This is because they often arrive on site with sand, gravel or other bulk materials, or get given to us by others who have had them in a delivery. They are still usually in pretty good condition, but the companies who delivered them don't take them back anymore because of the risk that they might break.

One excellent use is to make growing beds from them, especially if you have any areas that are difficult to grow on, like those under tarmac or slabs, or if you find you have soil that is so full of bricks and rubble that you can't dig it. In our beds, we folded the sides down to make the beds shallower, as a half-height bed still has plenty of depth to grow in, but it will take a lot less to fill it. We filled the half-height bed with a mixture of our local soil and municipal compost. We found this easier to do if we took some willow sticks and tucked these into the folded side. It helped keep the bag open and in shape for easy filling.



Tucking straight sticks into the sides of a bag bed makes it easier to fill.

Since then, the bags have provided us with a set of excellent crops of potatoes, and also proved to be a very good place to raise cuttings from fruit bushes.



Builder's bags make a good place to raise cuttings

We have also use the bags for compost storage, which works very well. The sides allow in some air, to help the mixture decay, but the bags help keep the compost together and keep off some of the rain. They are particularly good for holding partly-composted bark, manure or municipal compost that could do with a bit more decomposing before use. If you use them for leaves, they also work really well, with the added advantage that you can fill them almost full, close the top flap and then sit on them to compact the contents. Then, when you reopen the bag, the there is lots more room for more leaves.

A further advantage is that when we use the bags for making fresh compost, we can leave them wherever they are most useful. Any area that is being worked on can have the builder's bag left nearby, so less time is wasted moving waste to them main heap.

Builder's bags have also been used in Africa. Send a Cow has a great "how to" on their website, that uses a slightly different method to ours.