**Any old polystyrene?**

I or tights or garden canes? There's a practical use for almost anything. Ideas to try. Polystyrene

Soft polystyrene food trays are useful for weaving with young children, because the thread cuts into the polystyrene just enough to be held firm, and the shape of the tray makes it easy to pass other threads behind.

Small blocks of polystyrene packing are good for making minibeasts. Care is needed with very small bits that go up little noses.

Tights

A multitude of uses, especially stuffed with cotton wool. Michaela's room has slightly eerie ghostly faces made of cotton wool stuffed into tights. The features are simply pinched into shape and stitched. The large intestine on the digestive system display is made of stuffed tights. With appropriate twists and kinks it looks alarmingly realistic.

Thread and yarn offcuts

Spread short bits of wool and other yarn evenly and generously over a sheet of polythene. Cover with a layer of adhesive, such as Berol's "Marvin Medium" or PVA. When this is dry you can lift the whole thing off and you have, in effect, a spectacular sheet of multi-coloured material, because the bits of yarn are held together by the adhesive. A good demonstration of how one kind of material can change into another, and excellent for display.

Offcuts of material

Lots of uses, but one is making "soft" food. Resourceful children can make lovely hamburgers and pizzas and sausages from bits of material and wadding for stuffing. Then they can bring in real Pizza Express and McDonald's boxes to put them in for display.

Newspaper

When the pupils in Michaela's class did the standard primary project on recycling, instead of using new books or paper they made their own books from newspaper, with cereal box covers.

Newspaper can, of course, be used to make papier mache, much loved by the Victorians (who made furniture from it) as one of the first really "plastic" materials. Make it in layers over a mould, each layer a different colour so the pupils (and the teacher) can see the layers building up. If you use a hard mould, such as a bottle, it will stick. Avoid this by greasing the mould with cooking oil or petroleum jelly.

Kitchen utensils

Make a collection and keep them for cutting, shaping and imprinting patterns into clay. Anything will do - whisks, spoons, forks, fish slices, pastry cutters, garlic crushers. Perforated tools are good for pushing clay through. Michaela has a perforated vegetable steamer. "The children push clay through the holes to make lovely hair for model heads". Kitchen and dining forks of various sizes can be used for pressing down weaving on a frame.

Plastic milk cartons

The kind that is shaped like a jerrican, with a recessed handle, can be cut with a curve to make a scoop for powder paint or sand, or a container for wax crayons on children's desks.

Tubes

Robotic limbs, logs, telescopes, tunnels. Kitchen roll and cooking foil centres make an adequate substitute for toilet roll centres. Michaela's children make "function machines" for maths from card tubes and cereal boxes.

Boxes

A useful tip is to store cardboard boxes and packets flattened down, and then when you need them, reassemble them inside out, so that you can paint a plain surface rather than a coloured one.

Thin wooden slatted vegetable boxes can be stapled through the slats to wall displays, to create shelves for objects.

Plastic pop bottles

Take the base off and throw it away. Squash the bottom part of the bottle flat and glue together. Cut this flattened part into a fish tail shape. Cover with paper and paint and add fins to make a fish. The bottle top projects as a nose.

Bin liners

Excellent black background for a Space display on the wall.

Paint

Schools often have parental gifts of unwanted emulsion paint. Michaela uses a lot of this, and encourages children to experiment with colour mixing. "Just keep trying till you get what you want." The mural which covers a wall of the school hall was made in this way.

Non-aerosol spray containers Thoroughly washed can be used for spraying paint. Experiment with different kinds of sprayer and various types of paint in different dilutions.

Film canisters

Those tiny black cans that 35mm film comes in are useful for holding small quantities of paint and glue on children's desks.

Old window frames and picture frames Make frames for weaving.

Old and valueless pictures

Can be painted over, giving children the experience of painting on canvas.

Old postcards and greetings cards Sort out the ones that have interesting pictures, such as reproductions of old master paintings. The others provide a source of thin card for models.

Garden canes

Make frames for kites. Cover with plastic bags or bin liners.

Large tubes from the centre of carpet rolls Use to make trees for a rainforest project.

Sawdust

Use for Rangoli patterns on the doorstep at Diwali. Many schools make these with powder paint and glue, but sawdust with powder paint added for colour is an economical alternative and can be much more liberally used.

If you have any further tips for recycled resources, send them to the Resources Editor, TES, Admiral House, 66-68 East Smithfield, London E1 9XY.