

# Turn Your Trash into Someone's Treasure

fall is here, and the earth has begun its giant six-month-long exhalation. It seems that this is the cycle of life; inhale, exhale; take in, let go. My significant other, Mark, and I noticed long ago that we are either in acquisition mode or it's time to exhale and downsize. We've moved so often that we're well acquainted with this cycle. When we moved from a New York house to a Florida apartment, we downsized and got rid of our lawnmower, hose, patio table, and chairs. And when we bought our house in Sarasota, we needed to once again purchase all those things we'd gotten rid of. If your life has struck you as a constant struggle to acquire and get rid of the same stuff over and over, you'll be really glad to know about Freecycle Sarasota.

Freecycle Sarasota's purpose is simple – to keep useable items out of landfills. The Freecycle Network acts as a connector between people who are throwing away unwanted items and other people seeking those same items. People get what they need, the amount of waste is reduced, and it's just possible someone might have a good time along the way. It's ingenious, really.

Here's how easy it is to get involved. Log onto [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org), and enter Sarasota, Florida in the "find a group near you" window. Follow that link to "Visit the Sarasota Yahoo!Group page," and you're ready to join. Create a user profile, and you're off to the races. One caveat: you'll get about 15 separate emails at first with all of the rules and how-to's, but you can opt out when you sign up from future ones or have the future posts consolidated into one daily email.

Here's a sample of some of the posts listed the day I wrote this article:

*WANTED: one of those bicycle wheels that sits on the floor in front of your chair... so that you bicycle from sitting in your chair... Clark and Swift area.*

*OFFER: Conair Jacuzzi-like machine that produces intense bubbles to soothe and relax you. Good for sore backs, bodies, feet, etc. Barely used and was expensive. Has suction cups to hold it on and works great. Have power adapter and cords and the whole thing. Come get. Email me if you want it. First come, first serve.*



Mark is the one who told me about Freecycle, and we are still lamenting the fact that we were too busy to attend any of the three Freecycle garage "sales" that occurred this weekend. The truth is, we really need to offer some items up before we can even begin to imagine acquiring any more. Our utility sheds are stuffed, and I dare you to open a closet in the house without getting buried alive.

The facilitators of Freecycle Sarasota monitor the network closely, and in the interests of keeping the system working well and smoothly, they have a few rules. The first rule, and core principle, is that everything posted must be free. This means no trading, bartering, buying, or selling – or, as they put it, "just good ol' giving!" In addition to being free, everything posted must be legal and appropriate for all ages. As a result, you will be pleasantly surprised to find an absence of politics, spam, and religion at Freecycle. They don't traffic in pets, for as they point out, there are plenty of places to adopt a needy animal. The rules are simple and fair. No item is too big or too small to post, and you can post items you're looking for as well as items you have to offer. In fact, you are advised to use one of the following four words to begin your subject line: Offer, Taken, Wanted, Found.

The Freecycle concept reminds me of another internet invention called BookCrossing. At [bookcrossing.com](http://bookcrossing.com), you can register any book you have on the site and then "set the book free to travel the world and find new readers." The editors of [bookcrossing.com](http://bookcrossing.com) suggest the following ways to recycle your literature: "Leave it on a park bench, at a coffee shop, at

a hotel on vacation. Share it with a friend or tuck it onto a bookshelf at the gym – anywhere it might find a new reader! What happens next is up to fate, and we never know where our books might travel next."

When you register a book, it is given an identification number. When you find a book, you enter that number into the appropriate box, and the book is tracked as it makes its way around. The book's original owner can chart the book's journey and then even begin to interact with others who read it. Yet another ingenious idea brought to reality via the world wide web. It always seemed like a shame to me that after you read a book, it just sits there on your shelf collecting dust. That's why I joined the BookSwap I wrote about in a previous article. But now I like to think that all the books I lost over the years have made their way into the BookCrossing network, and that they are well-traveled and loved.

Could it be that the Internet generation has figured out a better way to reduce, reuse, and recycle? Infinitely cooler than thrift shops and dumpster diving, Freecycle Sarasota gives me hope that all those lessons about the value of sharing weren't wasted on our kindergartners.

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