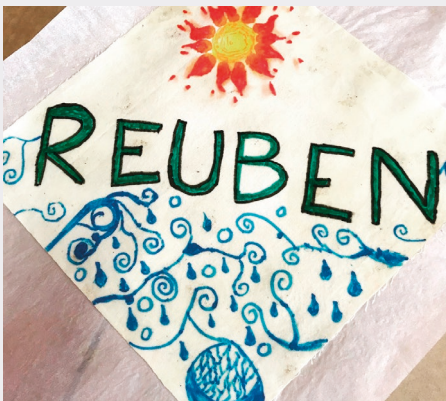


DIY: Mind your own beeswax

Cathryn Kohn describes how to make beautiful beeswax wraps to use in place of plastic wrap, and gives tips on maintaining them for a long life.

We opened our house for Sustainable House Day in 2016 and had almost 400 people come visit that day. We decided to do it all again this year and, expecting similar numbers, we decided that we would fundraise for sustainability and gardening projects at my daughter's primary school, by selling sustainability-related items like beeswax wraps and bags (along with home-cooked baked goods which were a big hit!).

We initially planned to get students at my daughter's school to make the beeswax wraps with help from Petra Chambers from The Grove 3429, a small beeswax wrap company based in Sunbury, Victoria. Petra ran an excellent workshop for two groups of students from Years 4, 5 and 6. Prior to the workshop, she got the students to design their own prints for the wrap cloth. Of course, this meant that each student made just one wrap that they wanted to keep for themselves and we couldn't ask them to sell them! However,



You can even print your own design onto cotton sheets to make into a wrap, as with this one made at a school workshop.

another parent and I sat in on the workshop and we were later able to make wraps at home and teach other parents from the school community.

Making beeswax wraps takes a bit of practice. I did a few practice runs using both the iron and the oven methods, following The Grove 3429's guidelines, before I had a 'making' session at my house with the other parents. I found the oven method to be the easier, but the iron method is necessary if you're making beeswax wraps that are too big to lay flat on an oven tray.

I'd also recommend purchasing pre-made wax mix blocks that contain the 'perfect' combination of beeswax, tree resin and jojoba oil. Petra sells these, with a formulation that she's come to after a lot of trial and error. There is information online about the amounts of beeswax, tree resin and jojoba oil to combine, but it can be difficult to get right—too much tree resin can make it too sticky, not enough can mean it's not self-adhesive enough. You really want to be able to wrap up a sandwich or a piece of cut fruit with the wrap adhering to itself to seal it, just as cling wrap would.

That brings me to their uses. You can use the completed wraps to wrap a sandwich, to cover a bowl of salad or leftovers, or to wrap cut vegies or fruit such as an avocado or cucumber. I mainly use them to wrap around plastic containers of meals that I take to work for lunch—particularly those that are a bit 'saucy' and prone to leak in my bag. Small wraps are useful for covering open cans. I've read that it's not recommended to use them with meat, but I do use a small wrap to seal the open tin of cat food.

Instructions for the oven and double-boiler method

- Materials and equipment:

- 100% cotton, pinking-sheared to whatever size you require (a medium-size wrap is around 28 x 28 cm; small is 20 x 20 cm)
- Wax mix block (or beeswax, tree resin and jojoba oil). One of Petra's 40 gram blocks will make three small wraps or one medium and one small, depending on the type of fabric. Heavier cottons absorb more wax, so a cotton poplin is recommended to get the most out of your wax
- Glass jar (around 500mL)
- Saucepan and stovetop
- Baking tray and oven
- Clean paintbrush or pastry brush that you no longer need—it will get a bit 'waxed up' and hardened
- Baking paper
- Clothes horse you don't mind getting wax on!
- Newspaper or drop sheet for under the clothes horse.

- Method:

1. Preheat oven to 150°C.
2. Lay newspaper or drop sheets under clothes horse.
3. Put the wax mix block into the glass jar and place jar in a saucepan of water (enough water so that it comes up to half the height of the jar). Bring the water to a simmer and allow the wax mix to melt completely (about 15 minutes).
4. While the wax mix is melting, place a piece of baking paper onto an oven tray and lay the piece of cotton material flat on the baking paper, allowing for a margin



If you find your wraps aren't self-adhesive enough, it may be that you didn't use enough wax mix—just repeat the process, adding a little.



Some finished wraps hanging up to dry—just beautiful!

of baking paper around the edges of the cotton so that the melted wax doesn't get on the baking tray.

5. Pick up the glass jar with an oven mitt or thick tea towel (it will be hot!) and carefully drizzle the melted wax onto the cotton sheet. Don't worry about covering the whole sheet with it as it will spread in the oven, and you will spread it further with the brush in a later step.
6. Place the tray of cotton into the oven for a few minutes and watch the wax mix spread through the material.
7. Pull the tray part-way out and use the brush to spread the melted wax mix over the whole cloth, including to the edges of the material. Make sure you have your oven mitts on and don't burn yourself! Then return the tray to the oven for another 30 seconds for the wax mix to completely melt into the cotton.
8. Carefully remove the tray from the oven and wait for the wrap to be cool enough for you to pick up; it shouldn't take long. Hold it vertically above the baking tray so that any stray drips are caught on the baking paper rather than your floor or bench. (The excess wax that is left behind on the baking paper will melt into the next wrap you make on that same paper!)
9. When it finishes dripping, hang the wrap over the clothes horse to dry and set (about 30 minutes).

If you find your wraps aren't self-adhesive enough, it may be that you didn't use enough wax mix—just repeat the process again with those unsticky wraps, but add a little more wax mix.

- Care instructions:

- DO NOT—as my partner once did—put your wraps in the dishwasher! Heat or hot water melts the wax and your wrap will once again become mere cloth. (But that's okay—you know how to make it into a wrap again!)
- To clean, hand wash in cold soapy water or just wipe down. Every few months, you may want to revitalise your wraps by putting them into an oven at 120 °C for a few minutes to redistribute the wax evenly. When the wax mix has melted it will move throughout the wrap and the fabric will look shiny; as soon as it looks like this remove it from the oven to avoid it burning. You can also combine a wrap-making session with a wrap-revitalising session as it's a similar process; the difference is you shouldn't need to add any more wax mix to your old wrap. They'll generally last eight months to a year. After that, you could add more wax to revitalise them, or cut them up and put them in the compost.

Safety note

- The beeswax mixture and the completed beeswax wraps are flammable and should be kept away from an open flame.
- Ensure you use an oven mitt or thick tea towel when holding the hot jar of wax.

RESOURCES:

The Grove 3429: thegrove3429.com

AUTHOR:

Cathryn Kohn

- Cathryn is a landscape architect and musician who lives in Preston, Melbourne, with her partner (also a landscape architect) and 7-year-old daughter.



Boomerang Bags

You may have seen Boomerang Bag stands popping up at your local supermarket; these are another great idea to reduce plastic waste. Instead of needing to buy a shopping

bag if you forget yours, you just take one from the stand and bring it back another day (or just keep using it). There are even Boomerang produce bags ready to be used in vegie shops. Made by volunteers from recycled materials and delivered to shops for free, these bags are a great community initiative, which all began on the Gold Coast in Queensland. boomerangbags.org