

Plastic Lumber

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In 1991 the Environmental Learning Center at Clackamas Community College approached us regarding the experimental use of plastic lumber in a greenhouse situation. We had a propagating house due to have its crumbling beds replaced that year, so we agreed to try it. We were given, free of charge, enough plastic lumber to replace a section of rooting bed 6 ft wide and 30 ft long, including the side boards.

The plastic lumber consists mainly of recycled milk jugs, yogurt containers, and nursery pots. The plastic is melted and extruded, like toothpaste, into boards. It is said to take 180 milk jugs to make one 2 in. × 6 in., 8-ft board.

The lumber comes in various colors and stabilizers are added to keep the color from fading. The boards we were given were either grayish-green or marbled black.

At the end of March, the cost was \$1.25 to \$1.35 per ft compared to \$0.77 to \$0.94 for preserved wood. In addition to being expensive, it is rather difficult to work with. It is heavy, but very strong. When cut, it is dusty. It is hard to hammer nails into, so we had to drill holes before nailing.

On the plus side, there is no maintenance. Regular wood benches need to be completely replaced about every 10 years. They must be painted with wood preservative every year and minor repairs must be made continually. Plastic wood benches will last for a few hundred years, we are told!

Another good point is that plastic lumber could have more of a demand in a time when wood is becoming less available and more expensive. It is a good use for discarded plastics, too.

Right now it is not being manufactured fast enough to meet immediate demand. In Portland, it may be ordered, but it takes a while to be delivered. We are happy to have gotten it when we did, and free at that.