

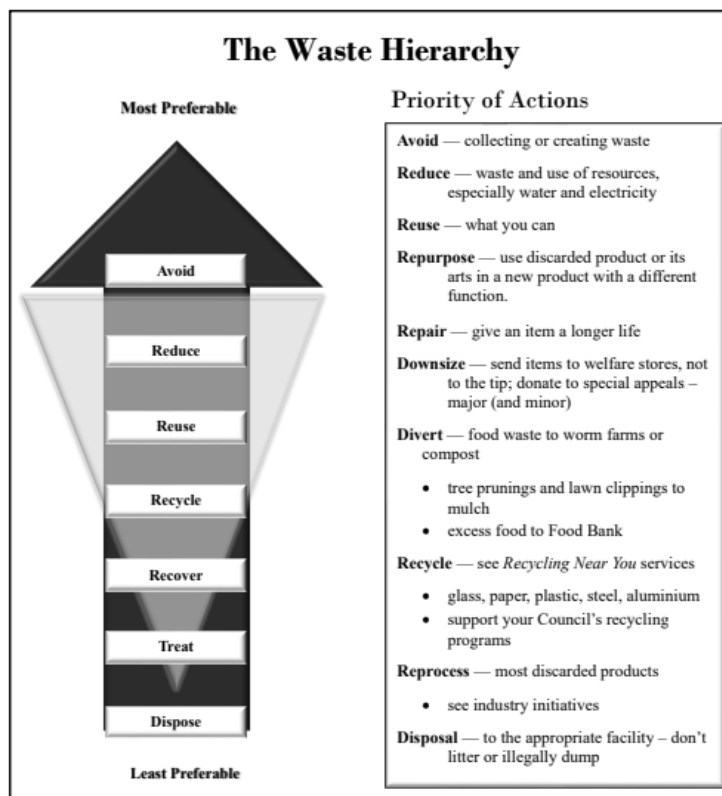
## Pallet Furniture – Repurposing old wooden timber pallets into practical furniture

(Written by Allan Fong – HOPE Researcher NSW)

### Introduction – The HOPE charter

In 2023, HOPE published a [brochure](#) to guide individuals, families, community groups and businesses to adopt sustainable living practices to lessen the impact on the global environment. The diagram to the right describes the **Waste Hierarchy**, listing various actions and their relative order of preference with **avoiding the creation of waste** being the highest priority and **disposing of waste** being the least preferable.

While we can make concerted efforts to avoid and reduce the creation of waste and use of resources, reuse and recycling also play key roles in waste minimisation. Modern day living requires people to buy furniture to furnish their homes, and while buying second-hand is an option sometimes people want something more stylish and modern. This feature article explores “pallet furniture” where old wooden timber pallets are repurposed to make practical, new customised furniture.



### Benefits of Pallet Furniture

Wooden shipping pallets are designed to withstand heavy shipping loads and are often made of hardwoods like oak or sturdy softwoods like pine, so it's not surprising they make an inexpensive and durable building block. Pallet furniture is the practice of transforming discarded wooden shipping pallets into custom, low-cost home and garden furniture such as sofas, bed frames, tables, chairs, shelves and garden furniture. Here are some of the benefits of pallet furniture:



- Budget friendly: discarded pallets are often free or inexpensive
- Eco friendly: minimises demand for new timber whilst diverting existing timber which has not yet reached end-of-life away from landfill
- Versatility: slats from pallet timber are the right size for making tables, sofas or planter boxes
- Customisable: furniture can be made to measure to your own requirements
- Stylish and chic: as furniture is custom-made, it is often very stylish and modern

### How to get started – Finding pallets

For small projects you can source pallets for free from local businesses. Business parks, distribution hubs, hardware stores and local nurseries frequently have unwanted pallets near loading docks, so ask store management if you can take them. Alternately, search for “free wooden pallets” on community marketplace websites like Gumtree or Facebook Marketplace. Some businesses such as “Keep it Simple Systems” sell recycled pallets too ([2nd Hand Recycled Pallets | Sydney | Keep It Simple Systems](#)).

## Safety Checklist

Pallets may be contaminated with chemicals and other matter so if there are any spills on it (including oil and food) they are best avoided. Once you have a clean pallet, check the stamp or markings:

- HT (Heat treated) – safe to handle and reuse for furniture and garden beds
- DB (Debarked) – safe standard processing mark
- MB (Methyl bromide) – avoid these as they are treated with a chemical pesticide

For more information on pallet markings, visit this link [Is my wood pallet safe for reuse - Learn how to know? • 1001 Pallets](#)

## Cleaning and preparing pallet wood

Once you have sourced suitable pallets, they should be cleaned before use. Furniture Divano.com ([How To Make Indoor Pallet Furniture](#)) suggests the following process:

- Disassemble pallets and remove all nails and screws
- Remove loose debris using a stiff-bristled brush
- Prepare a cleaning solution (e.g. plain detergent in water, or diluted bleach).
- Use a stiff brush dipped in the cleaning solution to scrub the pallets, and rinse well with plain water
- Allow the wood to dry in the sun for several days
- Sand, post-drying, to refine the surface
- Once dry, store in a closed area (e.g. garage, laundry) for further acclimatisation

## Building pallet furniture

While there isn't a dedicated national or statewide service to convert old pallets into furniture, there are many community organisations, social enterprises and local initiatives that convert discarded pallets into furniture. Alternately, an experienced handy person may want to take on the task themselves.

### **1. Men's Sheds and Community Sheds**

Local Men's Sheds and Community Sheds across Australia are popular users of reclaimed pallet timber which they use to build picnic tables, benches, planter boxes and play equipment. You can commission a nearby shed to build a particular piece to your own requirements. Visit the Australian men's Shed Association website to find out more about this important movement ([About Men's Sheds - Australian Men's Shed Association](#)) to address men's health and wellbeing and helping men to become valued and productive members of our community. Here are some images of incredibly inspiring pallet furniture built by local Men's sheds:



Figure 1 (left) – Kimba Men's Shed team makes outdoor tables from pallets ([The Thing about Kimba | Massive Thank You to the Kimba Men's Shed Team | Facebook](#))

Figure 2 (right) – Traralgon Men's Shed makes items for the bushfire affected communities of East Gippsland ([Shed project: bench seats for bushfire affected communities - Australian Men's Shed Association](#))





Figure 3 (left) – Hawkesbury Men's Shed, priding themselves on being a community service organisation that shares the experiences of their members whilst having a good chat and some fun ([Gallery – Hawkesbury Men's Shed](#))



Figure 4 (right) – Hopetoun and District Men's Shed, a place for members of the community to come and chat to others and use their skills on projects for themselves or work together on community projects ([Hopetoun & District Men's Shed - Australian Men's Shed Association](#))

## 2. The Home Handy Person

If you are handy and enjoy woodworking or know of someone who is handy, 1001Pallets ([1001Pallets - Thousands of Pallet furniture ideas & DIY Pallet projects!](#)) is one of the world's largest online communities dedicated to upcycling and repurposing wooden pallets. It features thousands of user-submitted projects and step-by-step plans and guides for beginner to advanced projects. From coffee tables, bed frames, sofas, wine racks, TV stands, potting benches, outdoor lounges to planter boxes, you are sure to find a project to meet your own requirements. Here are some examples of projects submitted to their website:



Figure 5 (left) – Garden bench, varnished with Walnut-coloured finish



Figure 6 (right) – Toilet seat, suitable for nighttime use, off-grid or camping. Made using one pallet



Figure 7 (left) – Kids Pallet Playhouse, built using four pallets



Figure 8 (right) – Clothes Rack, natural finish lightly sanded, with a broom handle for hanger pole and wheels for ease of moving.



Figure 9 (left) – King size Golden Oak Headboard, stained and finished with two coats of semi-gloss polyurethane



Figure 10 (right) – Diminutive pallet vanity for granddaughter



### 3. Social enterprises and local initiatives

The Bower Teaching Workshop at Summer Hill in Sydney NSW is an example of a practical, hands-on learning space where people can learn specific woodworking skills to upcycle reclaimed timber, as well as repairing and maintaining the things they already own. Classes are led by experienced facilitators to give participants the confidence to use tools, understand materials and complete their own projects. Central to The Bower's mission is to demonstrate the circular economy in action, so where possible reclaimed materials are used ([The Bower | Humanitix](#)).



Figure 11 (left) – Picture taken from The Bower Teaching Workshop website for their “Furniture Up-cycling and Finishing Workshop”

Among The Trees is a social enterprise whose mission is to make reclaimed timber accessible through high-quality lumber services and education. They do regular timber pick-ups around Sydney but also accept donations from individuals and companies. Once they have the timber, it is prepared for resale by removing nails and screws, cutting back the old and weathered layers. If you have your own timber, it can be machined into your required specifications (e.g. reduced to your required thickness). They also offer a wide range of woodworking courses including introductory woodworking, or specific courses to build a workbench or coffee table.



Figure 12 (right) – Photo taken from Among The Trees website [Marrickville's top reclaimed timber shop](#)

#### Want to know more?

Here's a list of websites if you want to know more about pallet furniture:

[1001Pallets - Thousands of Pallet furniture ideas & DIY Pallet projects!](#)

[40 Cheap DIY Pallet Furniture Ideas and Plans - Suite 101](#)

[How To Make Indoor Pallet Furniture](#)

[20 Beautiful DIY Pallet Furniture Plans You Can Build Today \(With Pictures\) | Home Grail](#)