

Reclaiming Wood



Repurposing Wood Waste: The Basics

There is something magical about transforming wood that is old and weathered into something new and useful. It inspires us and reminds us that life can be extended if we are resourceful and use our imagination. There are 3 main ways to reclaim wood from generators (deconstruction, salvaging and milling waste logs) and about a million different ways to repurpose wood waste into marketable products.

For a quick start-up business with very little investment, partner with wood waste generators and upcycle wood into quality home or business furnishings. In New Mexico salvaging is permitted but scavenging is not. In general salvaging refers to saving an item before it becomes waste, for example removing boards from a barn when it's still standing. Scavenging is unauthorized removal of material from a solid waste facility and is prohibited due to safety concerns. Work with your local solid waste management facility to create a partnership that works for both the facility and your private business. The State of New Mexico prohibits scavenging at any transfer station or landfill and businesses reserve the right to prosecute anyone "dumpster diving" as this is considered trespassing. In order to avoid trouble and have access to this valuable waste before it goes to the landfill, one must develop trusting relationships with the generators of the waste wood, so as to obtain the materials before they are thrown away.

There is excellent potential for revenue on both ends of this business model. Any, even small, deconstruction project could earn you a per hour wage for time. The material gathered could then be repurposed and sold at a profit.

"With everything that reclaimed wood has to offer...perhaps the greatest selling point is its incomparable beauty."

North Cal: The Premier Reclaimed Woods Co.



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Potential Customers:

- New Businesses
- Institutions
- Individuals
- Contractors
- Art Collectors

Space Requirements

Workspace and retail space for repurposed products will vary depending on the product size and how you will sell the items. Wood recycling operations can start in your backyard garage or shed. Consider room for expansion of employees or contracted artists.

Equipment Requirements:

One could easily begin this business armed with only simple household tools and a truck or van to collect the waste materials. A greater investment in tools and a workbench could make for easier work and a more productive business. Purchase of a portable saw mill could open another waste stream to reclamation, fallen trees. All applicable insurance and licenses are required as well.

Check with your local NM Small Business Development Center (www.nmsbdc.org) for assistance determining costs and fees.

Materials to Collect:

- Pallets
- Damaged Furniture
- Cabinets
- Flooring
- Construction & Demolition Debris
- Trees

Customer Selling Points:

Telling a good story is priceless in this business. Customers want to know how the item came to be. What was it before? Did the material come from a famous place? How did you obtain the material? The environmental benefits of saved energy and natural resources and diversion from the landfill are good points. You may also mention the economic benefit of jobs created!

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Potential Generators of Waste:

Everyone generates wood waste at some point. You'll need to decide what kind of wood waste you want (pallets, old furniture, 2x4s, etc) then search out where that waste is likely to occur. Tear down a fence. Organize a garage. Help someone move. Each of these situations could earn a wage *and* produce excellent materials for repairing or repurposing. Develop relationships with Home Owner's Associations and contractors to obtain construction and demolition debris. Realtors often produce waste furniture from model homes. Varieties of businesses throw out or stockpile unwanted pallets. For small pieces of hardwoods, contact cabinet shops or local woodworkers for their discards. These little items aren't suitable for large projects but can be transformed into beautiful jewelry, boxes, cutting boards and more.

Potential Customers:

Upcycled and repurposed products are gaining serious attention for both individuals and companies looking for the unique and captivating. Your products can be sold on-line through retailers like Etsy or from your own store front. One could also just fulfill custom orders.

A brief sample of news headlines shows us that customers for reclaimed wood products are EVERYWHERE.

"Reclaimed Furniture to be Sold at New Shabby Chic Store."

"Law Firm of Buckfire & Buckfire, Furnishes Office with Reclaimed Wood."

"Reclaimed Furniture Company Begins on Facebook"

Case Study:



A small portable saw mill allows one to create lumber from waste logs.

Casey Just, owner of Just Call Us, manages a home maintenance & repair business and a reclaimed wood furnishings shop. The home tending services provide most of the raw materials to produce fine reclaimed home furnishings from benches to bowls. Through paid demolition or repair projects, Casey reclaims waste wood products then repurposes for use in other projects. In this fashion, old barn siding becomes beautiful indoor paneling or a broken door becomes a table.

Casey recently purchased a portable saw mill, which allows him to create lumber from fallen or unwanted trees. He put it to use immediately by sawing into a tree that a neighbor paid to have cut down. Each board is unique and more beautiful than anything found in a lumber store, as he has left the raw bark edge on each piece. Once it cures, he plans to make raw-edge furniture for custom orders.

True salvaging spirit leads Casey to imagine the new life of just about anything. A fallen tree becomes a twisted handrail. A stump washed up on the beach becomes gorgeous wall art. He can even be found thumbing slowly through the boards at a lumber yard, carefully selecting the knotty pine or snarled oak 2x4 that he knows other contractors will pass up. That will become the next masterpiece.

Product Ideas

You can make artistic products just from wood or consider adding other materials for form and function. A quick internet search on any of the following topics will provide great inspiration.

- Pallet Furniture – Indoor and Outdoor
- Decorative Frames and Painted Signs
- Flooring and Cabinets
- Jewelry
- Organizational Tools



Considerations

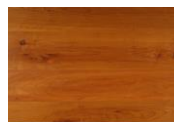
While scavenging is prohibited at transfer stations, *managed collection* of waste items could be a viable option at the discretion of the solid waste management agency. It is still best practice to divert the waste materials at the source.

A deconstruction "industry" as strong as the demolition industry is yet to unfold, but non-profit organizations and small businesses are quickly recognizing the benefit, as cities are faced with a high number of vacant and abandoned structures. Even though deconstruction is more expensive than demolition, you will salvage enough usable material to resell it and offset the additional expense. You will have diverted up to 40% of the building's contents as opposed to 0% and you will have a great story to tell.

A portable saw mill can turn fallen trees into beautiful lumber that can be used just like new lumber, but for a fraction of the environmental cost. Problem trees cut down can be diverted from the chipper or the landfill and given another life. This is another steady stream of waste material for the small reclamation business to consider.

"Inherent in the older material is the richness and variety of the color palette of the heart content of the tree which can only be approximated today with stains."

Reclamation Lumber



A gorgeous color pallet of old reclaimed wood.