Things to do with a old computer

by **prodlad** on February 14, 2009

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Intro: Things to do with a old computer

If your any sort of computer enthusiast you will have couple of old computers lying around gathering dust; but don't throw them away! With even the littlest bit of effort you can make them into something new! With everybody twittering on about recycling and climate change you could do your bit to help.

There are nearly endless possibility's to what you could do with a old machine.

EDIT: Thanks for featuring you guys!

OK, I'm adding a new section to my instructable of photos of what it is actually possible to build from from an old computer so if you built anything from an old computer email me a photo or two to prod_lad@hotmail.co.uk and il feature you in the new section.

step 1: Before you crack it open...

Before you go ripping it open remember that you can reuse the whole computer and not just some of the components.

1.-Install Linux
Linux is an open source OS that you can install on your old computer and use it as a everyday computer, for those of you out there that are not geeks that just basically means its a OS like windows XP that people give away free that you can use. You could do endless things with linux and there is a distribution to suit every computer.

Ubuntu -
This is for some of the better spec computers out there. Its is the most like proper a OS and it is the most user friendly. It can easily do everyday tasks like Surfing and sending email's. I needs:
400 MHz x86 processor
64 MB of system memory (RAM)
4 GB of disk space
Graphics card capable of 1024x768 resolution

Puppy Linux -
This is a slightly less user friendly version of linux. Is is for those less functional PC's with not as good a spec. It needs:

CPU : Pentium 166MMX
RAM : 64MB
CDROM : 20x and up

Damn Small Linux
OK if none of the above options have worked for you, you must really have a scrappy computer. It is very basic and is not user friendly. It requires
486dx or 100% compatible processor
16mb ram (24mb recommended)
dual-speed CDROM (quad-speed or better recommended) (thats 2x or 4x)
1.44mb floppy drive (for boot floppy, if needed)

Now I have never done the following options before so I can't go into detail on how to do them but you can google them:

Turn it into a server (web, printer, file etc.)
Put a big hard driver in it and make it a jukebox
Put a TV tuner into it and a big hard drive and make it a PVR
Use it as a firewall
Use it as a stress reliever
Automate Your Home
Use it as a answering machine
Make the monitor into a aquarium
Make it into a rendering farm
Trade It in
Put it in your car
Give it away/Donate
There are some more in the comments!

step 2: The CD-Drive

OK if none of those last options worked for you its now time to crack it open. So lets start with the simple components and work our way up. So the 1st component is the cd drive.

1.Make it into CD player.
Yes, this one is very simple. All you have to do is take the CD drive and the power supply out and connect them together like they were in the computer. If your PSU is the ATX standard to make the power supply work without the computer short one of the black wires and then green wire in the big motherboard connector. You can use a piece of wire or a paper clip or just chop them off and then join them. Now all you have to do is hook speakers or your hifi into the headphone socket on the front of the drive. Then press the play/fast forward on the front of it.

2.Make it into a laser pointer
If you have a DVD-RW and are not planning to use it in another computer you could turn it into a laser pointer. USE with caution
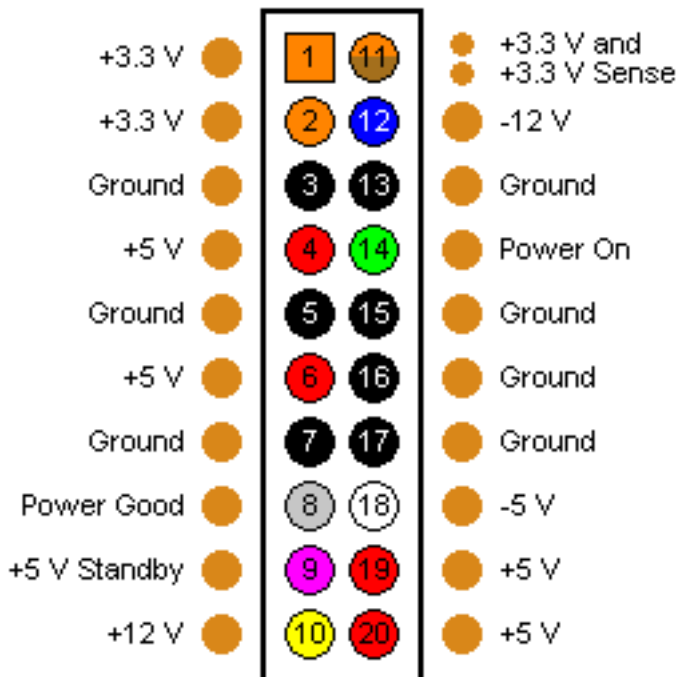
See HERE

3.Make it into a safe
This makes a great hiding place. What you do is you hollow out the drive and you can use it as a great hiding place! If you are going to attempt this and are smart enough and can keep the motor mechanism (ie open and close with the open/close switch) I would suggest cutting the two black ground wires off the power connector and putting them through a basic on/off keyswitch. Therefore if you do let slip about it they wont be able to open it with out the key.

See HERE

4.Make a Roulette Wheel
This is a brilliant idea. If you can never decided who is going to get the coffee or are just indecisive this is the gadget for you!

See HERE

step 3: Floppy Drive

The humble floppy drive. Gone and almost forgotten. They are handy in even the latest computers for flashing BIOS's and other tasks. There are hundreds of uses for floppy disks, all you have to do is search Instructables for "floppy disk" but there aren't so many for the drive itself. If you have a MacIntosh floppy drive, your in luck as there is some uses for them.

1-The eject motor
The eject motor in apple floppy disk drives are very strong and efficiently would make a fine motor for use in a robot or another project.

See HERE

2. A Amp case
If by any chance you have a Apple PC 5.25 Floppy Drive and a Sonic Impact 5066 T-amp or similar you can make a cool case for it. If you were adventurous enough make it into a slot loading dvd drive.

See HERE

step 4: Hard Drive

OK, believe it or not you can do alot with a old hard drive. If you have gave your best efforts to try and fix it and its completely dead you can try some of these-

1. Make it into a clock-
Yes the disc out of a hard drive actually makes a pretty good clock and it looks cool.

See HERE

Or if you think your really good, try this one!

See HERE (If you dare)

2. Use it as a fake
Now you can impress your mates with your USB hard drive thats actually made out of memory sticks.

See HERE

3.Turn it into a rotary input device-
Thats basically a wheel that you turn that controls your computer

See HERE

4. Make a tesla turbine
A tesa turbine is a thing that converts air and water motion into eletricty.

See HERE

5.Make a really strong fridge magnet
In hard drives there are super strong magnets...These make great fridge magnets!

See HERE

6.Make it into a safe
This ones pretty simple; gut a hard drive and store stuff inside it

See HERE

7.Simply Use It as a Coaster
Self-explanatory. But the only thing I would say is that if you have a USB cup warmer you could take the heating plate out of it so it would keep your drink warm!

See HERE

step 5: Power Supply
There arnt as many uses for the power supply but thats not to say the few there is for it isn't good.

1.Convert it to a Bench Top Power Supply
Computer PSU's provide stable voltage with short circuit and thermal protection. Makes it perfect for a bench top Supply.

See HERE for my very own Instructable on the matter

2.Build A Fireworks Launcher
DONT ATTEMPT THIS IF YOU NOT OVER 18 but if you want to risk blowing your head off be my guest.

See HERE

3.Recycle it into a fume extractor.
All you have to do is take the guts out of it and hook the fan up to 12v. Great for soldering!

See HERE

step 6: Motherboard, CPU and RAM
OK since there isn't many uses for these parts I shoved them all into one step.

Processor-
OK to be honest you can't do alot with a processor but surprisingly you can make a hairbrush and a belt buckle.

1.Gold Plated Hair Brush
This ones pretty self explanatory, get a processor and glue it to a chunk of wood or metal; But heres the link anyway

See HERE (If your not bald)

2.A Geeky Belt Buckle
This ones quite cool but I wouldn't wear it as a everyday belt.

See HERE

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RAM-
At first I didn't think there was much usage for RAM except put them all into one comuter and put it to use as in the 1st step, but stranoster brought these to my attention.

1.RAM comb
To go with your processor hairbrush!

See HERE

2.Make it into a mood light
Surprisingly its possiable.

See HERE

Motherboard-
You may be asking me " What possibly can I do with a old motherboard, well the answer is not very much.

1.Make it into a bracelet
I don't really recommend this as the motherboard is full of poisious chemicals but Meh here is the link.

See HERE

2.Make little men/bugs!
This is very cool

See HERE

Well not much left now except a few fans, the power switch and LEDs, a few PCI cards and some cables.

Fans
These are quite handy just to have lying around incase one in your proper computer packs up.

1. Hook it up to batteries
If you live in a area where it sometimes gets hot, these are very useful. Hook it up to a 9v battery or wire it up to USB and walla you have your own personal fan.

See HERE
OR
See HERE (Battery Powered)

2.Make a hover craft
Isn't exactly the next age of personal transport but its a start. But don't use x3 9v battery's only use
one.

See HERE

3.Make a air filter
Not a bad idea...

See HERE

4.Make a better air filter
Better but a bit more complicated

See HERE

5.Rav them Out!

See HERE

Power Switch And LED'S
They can't be really reused in a cool fashion but are useful as switches in other projects.

step 8: Stuff that has been built

OK, This is a new section to my instructable of photos of what it is actually possible to build from from an old computer so if you built anything from an old computer email me a photo or two to prod_lad@hotmail.co.uk and il feature you in this new section.

Image Notes
1. Fume Extractor By: sensoryhouse

Image Notes
1. PC Grow Case by opencan

Image Notes
1. Wall Clock by ERCBIENG

Image Notes
1. Back of Wall Clock by ERCBIENG

step 9: The case

Well now all your left with is the case and the dust bunnies. There's not really much to do with the case except except make it look cool by adding a few LED'S . Anyways I hope you enjoyed pwning your old computers.

Sorry if some of the words are messed up, I tried to spell check it on my wii Internet but it messed it up, as a result of that possibly some of he links wont work. If some dont please tell me. Also my grammar and spelling isn't that good in the first place and a special thanks to cflowers for featuring it on The daily hack

If you have any more ideas or suggestions I'd like to hear them.

OK, I'm adding a new section to my instructable of photos of what it is actually possible to build from from an old computer so if you built anything from an old computer email me a photo or two to prod_lad@hotmail.co.uk and il feature you in the new section.
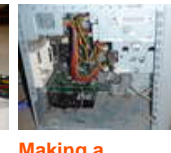

Related Instructables

How-to: Build A PC by Flea

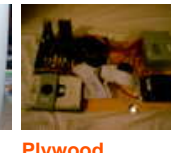**How to Build A Custom PC: The Complete n0ob's Guide to Building a Computer** by technick29
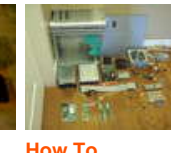
How to build your very own PC! by jrgcool35

How to build a Custom PC by MrNintendo

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How To Disassemble a Computer by Shadow Ops

Another Benchtop Power Supply from PC Power Supply by LancePenney

Comments

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Colonel88 says: Nov 3, 2009. 5:29 AM **REPLY**

I know that u can use them for like everything. one time i found someone put out 2 good computers out on the streets. They just cut all the wires and i got a good 1 gig of ram from 2 ram pieces and 2 dvd burners. Also i got like 1 really big fan and other good stuff. I need to find a place where they put out all the old computers, ie like the dump in picture 1

Gamer917 says: Oct 24, 2009. 11:44 PM **REPLY**

the pic in step 9 reminds me of the computers used as cooking grills in the back rooms in Portal.

Skater_j10 says: Oct 10, 2009. 12:55 PM **REPLY**

So I was looking around Instructables and found a few more people recycling PC parts to make new smaller/creative PC's and cases, so I ended up making group called "Small Form Factor ". It's a group devoted to sharing info. on small DIY computer projects/concepts and in turn finding new uses for old PC parts. Please Join if you are interested. I forgot to mention that I have added your instructable to the group along with a bunch of others. I hope you don't mind.

prodlad says:

Oct 11, 2009. 6:35 AM **REPLY**

no, thats ok. il join sometime

Blackice504 says:

Oct 6, 2009. 1:54 PM **REPLY**

i always use my old computers my oldest computer is a 486DX that is still running it does a simple job it make sure that my house is nice temp and controlls some lights (but i moved a year ago and not hooked it back up to outside lights lol LAZY) and i have a good old PII 350Mhz with 256Mb of ram she is the firewall for my network, some people who have more money then brains build a 2000 doller rig for media center sorry you not really need that much i have a PIII800 with some super Nvidia GPU (forget what it is) it has 512mb it plays dvd's great and avi files divX ect. fine.

Great instructable.
i hope more people really do use there computers and not throw them in some pile of rubish that they not belong in. :'(poor computers once loved then thrown.
PS out of all the upgrades i have done i have never thrown out a computer with out taking all i can get out of it for spare parts. great caps on some mobo's really nice mosfets.

Fr0ZenWolf says:

Oct 5, 2009. 4:34 PM **REPLY**

You missed 1 aspect that I've had fun with on my old drives, the strong magnets. There are a lot of things you can do with the magnets from a hard drive (I believe someone on here posted one called "the mother of all fridge magnets"). Never underestimate the usefulness of a strong magnet.

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prodlad says:

Oct 6, 2009. 10:23 AM **REPLY**

its up there at no.5

Fr0ZenWolf says:

Oct 6, 2009. 12:34 PM **REPLY**

how did I miss that...

Coliflower says:

Apr 5, 2009. 6:32 PM **REPLY**

I was just sitting here looking at this (going 'wow') with a dead hard drive in my hands. Of course, being a 12 year old boy without tools or resources, i couldnt do anything here. Then i had the decent idea (or at least i thought so) of using it as a hair comb b/c of the little spikes. When i tried it, it actually kinda worked! So, because i was too lazy to make an instructable about it, and partly because it wasnt that instructable worthy, i'd like to give the idea to you, perhaps to even edit in into this 'ible. anyways, your choice, just thought it was a good idea.

Great job!

---

prodlad says:

Oct 6, 2009. 10:24 AM **REPLY**

Thanks, yeah im only 14 but my dad works at cb radios so theres tons of tools in our garage. YAY

---

bwpatton1 says:

Oct 5, 2009. 6:10 PM **REPLY**

Great Ideas, if you had one with a modest 2.0 or up you could build a server and use the rest as thin clients via RDP, hehe I like thin clienting. Ill have a upcoming instructable, if I ever get time to finish it.
Im actually using one of my thin clients at the moment

---

fallenspirit123 says:

Sep 24, 2009. 2:18 PM **REPLY**

My information tech class has a bunch of those Ultra defender cases you have. except the internals are custom which is pretty awesome!

---

rayfalcon says:

Feb 28, 2009. 12:12 AM **REPLY**

Not to put pie in your face or to be a smartty or nothing like that just from one computer and electronics lover to another the cases can be used for tons of stuff..i will tell a few here 1 cut a hole in your wall and securly mount the case in the wall sideways for cases where the sides slide off as a in wall safe or behind a picture safe. 2 build a power station out of it most cars run on 12 vdc (volts dc) so does computers and their power packs so for every ide connector build circuitry out of old capacitors condensors and diodes and leds and also the cmos batteries or cr2032 batteries from wal-mart (to store the constant 12vdc to boost with) as a portable booster pack or 3 line the case with old mirrors and some reflective material (heat and or flame proof) and make a night stand light using the same princable as the booster to conserve electric run it on the stored dc of a night and charge it of a day (hint hint these also can work for short times in case of juice failure ((if charged before hand)) as an emergency lighting source).
rayfalcon aka charles the computer geek for 16 yrs.
ALSO PLEASE be careful with those monitors especially the plasma screens they contain 27.83% mercury and radon as well as other type of deadly gases even in trace amounts like 3 ppm in other words if you busted it in your garage and breathed it for 2 minutes you would be reallly really sick headache nausea and at 3.5 minutes - 5 minutes you would die without ventilation of fresh air and medical treatment.

DragonFlux says:

Sep 23, 2009. 8:47 AM **REPLY**

@rayfalcon - Or you could use that old PC to learn some half-decent grammar. I English isn't everyone's first language on this site (or even second), but there's a difference between not knowing better and just being lazy! Don't get me wrong, I'm not putting down your ideas, just saying more people might benefit from them if they could actually follow what you are trying to say...

---

beat_mixa says:

Sep 16, 2009. 7:02 AM **REPLY**

I made a smoke extractor fan outta some garden hose taped to half a coke bottle, with the computer fan taped onto the bottom of it. good times.

---

opencan says:

Jul 16, 2009. 4:02 AM **REPLY**

I have made an indoor grow-case out of an old PC case,

something like this one:
http://www.homegrown-hydroponics.com/pcgr3plsthyg.html

but using more light, 2 fans from another coputer to move air around and one big PC fan in a DIY carbon air filter.

My unit is made to using dirt and not hydro methods.

As for now its not in use due to heating issues (33-41C outside so adding the 2x45W CFLs heat inside its pretty hard to use) but its very funcional in the winter. I can grow basil inside there all-round the year and not only in the summer. :D

---

prodlad says:

Aug 27, 2009. 4:59 AM **REPLY**

can you please send me a photo of that to my email, its in the first and last step of the instructable

---

opencan says:

Aug 27, 2009. 5:16 AM **REPLY**

Sure, in a minute.
There are only seedlings there currently as the ventilation is too poor to operate anything larger right now with the 38C outside.
In 2 weeks or so I'll start a new complete grow. If you can, please remind me in 3-4 weeks and I'll give you some better pictures :D

Bob Phil McMooow says:

Jun 20, 2009. 9:42 PM **REPLY**

That poor computer! What did it do to it's owners to deserve that?? Let them RIP, after you have RIPPED out all the componants, naturally.

---

prodlad says:

Aug 27, 2009. 5:00 AM **REPLY**

freeze, crash, blue sceen

Bob Phil McMooow says:

Aug 27, 2009. 5:07 AM **REPLY**

Ah, the good old BSOD. Nothing like a good error message.


Derin says:

Jul 10, 2009. 11:30 AM **REPLY**

You mean that grill-who-or-it-whatever-way-you-want-that-used-to-be-a-tower?

Dorkfish92 says:

Feb 23, 2009. 3:22 PM **REPLY**

hmm, I wonder if you could make a mug warmer with the processor. I might have to try that...

---

dla888 says:

Jul 22, 2009. 1:55 AM **REPLY**

HaHa I made one of those.

---

prodlad says:

Aug 27, 2009. 4:58 AM **REPLY**

can you please send me a picture of that to my email, my email is in step 1 and the last step in the instructable

---

prodlad says:

Feb 24, 2009. 12:30 PM **REPLY**

LOL, that would be cool

---

ttmaster4444 says:

Aug 17, 2009. 1:55 PM **REPLY**

hey, i made the cd player and it works great, thnx :)

---

prodlad says:

Aug 27, 2009. 4:55 AM **REPLY**

Can you please send me a picture of it to my email prod_lad@hotmail.co.uk

---

daniknotts says:

mmmm....yummy chemical infused food....super heated tin releases many forms of alloy oxidation. A portion of which will undoubtedly end up in your meat.

Feb 26, 2009. 5:52 PM **REPLY**

ATG says:

hahaha.....'yummy chemical infused food' lol....u just made my day.....

Aug 7, 2009. 5:26 AM **REPLY**

prodlad says:

i got that off google images lol

Feb 27, 2009. 8:39 AM **REPLY**

k_man93 says:

old memes are old. rules 1 and 2

Jul 30, 2009. 7:46 PM **REPLY**

WanderingAuthor says:

Voltage will sting, but it is the amps that will kill you. You can get a nasty burn from high voltage, but what it takes to kill you is a quarter of an amp across your heart. A twelve volt car battery could give you a lethal jolt, if you got careless.

Feb 26, 2009. 6:45 PM **REPLY**

90kar08 says:

You need the voltage to get the amps! The resistance of the human body is way to high to get a zap from 12 or even 24 volts.

Mar 16, 2009. 12:51 PM **REPLY**

Pixels303 says:

thats right folks, 90kar09 is spot on.
I did the tests and found that around 70 volts is the highest potential a person could sustain with dry hands before the current was too much to hold.
12 Volts simply doesn't have the potential for passing enough current through you (Even if you have wet hands). Only way you have any concern is when you have a inductive load on 12 volts is turned off passing current through you when the magnetic poles collapse.

Jul 27, 2009. 12:07 AM **REPLY**

dla888 says:

24 volts is very hazardous. 120 volts will zap you and jerk you around, while 24 volts will zap you and hold you.

Jul 22, 2009. 1:43 AM **REPLY**

SpantaX says:

24 volts is not hazardous.. you won't even feel it.. unless you touch the power source with your tounge.. the tounge is sensitive, and you can feel 9 volts..

Jul 23, 2009. 5:15 AM **REPLY**

dla888 says:

AR eyou refering to AC or DC power.

Jul 25, 2009. 12:47 PM **REPLY**

SpantaX says:

up to 24 V - DC

over 24 V - AC

Jul 26, 2009. 9:38 PM **REPLY**

awang8 says:

That's right. You need volts to carry the amps across.

Mar 17, 2009. 10:42 PM **REPLY**

vitruvian8807 says:

I wonder if there's such a thing as an electrical capacitance bracelet or something. Or something you could wear that would absorb some or most of the electricity from a zap, provided you don't touch electric poles and such.

Mar 21, 2009. 1:21 PM **REPLY**

yellowtwo says:

I'm at work, this made me LoL, people looked at me funny...

Aug 25, 2009. 3:04 PM **REPLY**

schetleft says:

maybe a layden jar that you could wear?

Mar 21, 2009. 6:28 PM **REPLY**

blakdragon19 says:
ummm, a car battery can deliver about 500 amps on average... so yeah.

Feb 28, 2009. 8:57 AM **REPLY**

prodlad says:
to be presise its 60 milliamps

Feb 27, 2009. 8:43 AM **REPLY**

Derin says:
120Ah,about 200A cold crank.

Mar 5, 2009. 2:26 AM **REPLY**

awang8 says:
But it doesn't usually reach your heart in time to kill you...

Feb 27, 2009. 9:07 PM **REPLY**

Nando_Kommando says:
right, I've been zapped by the car battery when I was really young. It through me a little ways, but I'm still here!

Mar 10, 2009. 9:36 AM **REPLY**

Plasmana says:
Yeah...

Mar 14, 2009. 5:01 PM **REPLY**

dla888 says:
Drillpresses are appropriate for that task. (small ones)

Jul 25, 2009. 12:49 PM **REPLY**

view all 194 comments