

NORTHWEST EARTH INSTITUTE ECO-TIPS

MOVING TOWARD ZERO WASTE

If you're putting out a full-size can of garbage a week, you're missing an opportunity to lighten the load on the planet. Here's a step-by-step approach to reduce waste.

STEP ONE - RECYCLING

The first step is to recycle everything your garbage hauler or recycler will take. In many communities that means:

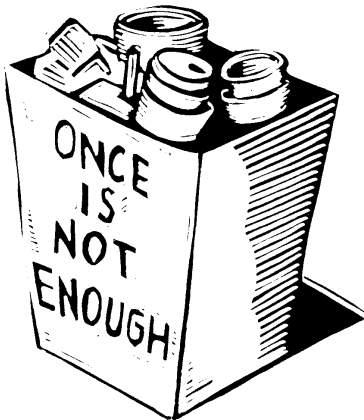
Newspaper	Cardboard/Brown Bags	Glass Containers	Tin Cans	Yard Debris
Scrap Paper	Magazines	Aluminum	Scrap Metal	

Scrap paper does not include tissue paper, but otherwise it's very inclusive. Envelopes with plastic windows or gummed labels are acceptable. As long as the paper isn't coated with plastic, wax, carbon, or foil, it's probably okay. Watch out for Christmas card envelopes and wrapping paper that may be decorated with foil. Paper cartons containing food are often covered with plastic so it's best not to include them. Sometimes it's possible to separate the plastic liner from a container, as in frozen juice concentrate cans (soak with water first) or pet food bags, so the paper can go into scrap.

If the above items are not collected curbside in your community, call your local government to find out whether there are any drop-off centers where you can take them.

Also ask about other items that sometimes have local markets for reuse or recycling:

- Plastic tubs and plastic bags – In some communities these items may be taken back to a store for recycling.
- Foam packing peanuts --These can be reused by mail service outlets.
- Rigid foam packaging – Check with your local government to see if anyone recycles rigid foam.
- Motor oil, filters, antifreeze, batteries, and tires – Since these are so toxic, or a nuisance, in the environment, local governments often provide for recycling.



- Books (including phone books) – There may be outlets for selling or donating books for reuse in your community. The binding and hard covers generally keep books from being recycled with paper, but some recyclers have the ability to accept them.
- Wood and dry wall – Check with your solid waste official to see if any local companies accept these.
- Cloth products – Even if they are torn or stained, thrifts sometimes accept clothing and other fabrics for rags or recycling.

- Electronics (computers, printers, cell phones, TVs, etc.) – Electronics contain toxic metals and shouldn't be landfilled or incinerated. Check with your local solid waste official about reuse/recycling opportunities.
- Clothes hangers – These can often be taken to dry cleaners for reuse.

STEP TWO – COMPOSTING

Once you are comfortable with recycling, it's time to make another dramatic reduction in waste through composting. A compost pile will keep all your grass clippings, fallen leaves, and garden debris out of the garbage and turn them into a soil amendment. You can also add wood ashes and drier or vacuum-cleaner fluff. Even if you give it no attention, a pile of organic debris will eventually degrade because of the action of bacteria, fungi, and other organisms. If you want the compost sooner, the trick is to grow more bacteria to do the work for you. Bacteria need a certain mix of carbon and nitrogen, and lots of surface area to thrive (a shredded leaf or twig has more surface area than a whole one), water, and air. Turning the pile helps provide air. Holding bins are not required, but they are very helpful in keeping the pile organized and slightly.

Once you have successfully composted yard debris, you can add food waste like vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds, and plate scrapings. To avoid pest problems, leave out meat, dairy, oil, or grain products. Just dig a hole in your compost and bury the food, covering it up with compost. Other ways of composting food scraps are a worm bin or burying in the soil. A worm bin is usually a home-made box, with holes drilled in the bottom, and a lid. It is filled with bedding such as damp shredded newspaper and a pound of red worms, which digest the food. If you are burying food in the ground, cover with at least eight inches of soil.

STEP THREE – PACKAGING AND DISPOSABLES

Now it's time to attack the bane of American society—packaging and disposables that are not recyclable or compostable. That's where pre-cycling comes in—altering your purchasing habits to end up without waste. Seek out those grocery, meat, and hardware stores where items are not prepackaged in plastic. If you can't find the product you need without excess packaging, unwrap it at the store and leave the package there along with your explanation. Get yourself some every-day cloth napkins to replace paper ones; dish towels and rags to replace paper towels; and containers with lids to avoid using plastic wrap and foil. Patronize restaurants that use washable plates and utensils.

STEP FOUR – ANALYZING WHAT'S LEFT

Now that there's so little in your trash can, you can easily see what's left and determine how it could be eliminated.