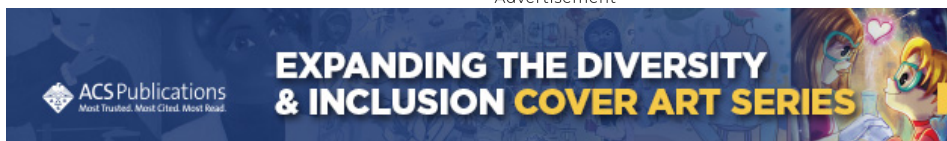


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Homeowner's Guide on How To Recycle

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Ever tentatively throw an item into a recycling bin, hoping it'll be recycled, but not totally sure it will? We can help!

In high school during the 1990s, I was part of the environmental club. Our main activity involved visiting elementary schools in our town to teach students about [recycling](#). At the time, reduce-reuse-recycle

was the crux of environmentalism.

Since then I've been an avid recycler. I always encourage family and friends to toss their soda can or plastic water bottle in the correct recycle bin to help save the planet.

We generate A LOT of trash. [Municipal solid waste](#) in 2018 hit 292.4 million tons or 4.9 pounds per person per day, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Of that, 69 million tons (or 25%) was recycled.

Recycling, of course, means collecting and processing materials that would otherwise be thrown away as trash and turning them into new products. Although it's preferable to reduce energy and pollution by not creating the waste in the first place, recycling can reduce the need for virgin materials, and save the energy required to extract and manufacture them.

Many people aren't clear on what can and can't be recycled, leading to contamination of the recycling stream. Each municipality or building may have different recycling guidelines, so be sure to ask or look them up online. Also, you can find recycling facilities in your area on these searchable databases: [Call2Recycle](#), [Earth911](#) and [GreenerGadgets](#).

To avoid "wishcycling," i.e. putting something in the recycling bin in the hope it can be recycled, let's review the following tips for recycling common household goods.

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How To Recycle Paper

Most curbside recycling programs accept paper, but check to be sure. Look for drop-off locations as well. In general, if you can tear the paper, it can be recycled.

According to the [American Forest & Paper Association](#), common recyclable paper products include writing paper, notebooks, stationery, newspaper, magazines, catalogs, white office paper, envelopes and paper padded mailers.

Make sure paper products are dry and clean. For paper with sensitive information, like bank statements, cross out numbers and identifying details with a black marker for security. Also keep in

mind it's more difficult to recycle shredded paper. If you shred, it's better to throw it away.

How To Recycle Cardboard

Most curbside recycling programs accept corrugated cardboard (shipping boxes) and paperboard (cereal and juice boxes), but check for local guidelines. Look for drop-off locations as well. Always flatten boxes before placing them in the recycle bin.

Make sure the cardboard is dry; cover your bin in case it rains. While it's important to remove materials inside the box, like packing peanuts, plastic bags and bubble wrap, it's OK to leave on tape and labels. For pizza boxes, cut out any oil stains before recycling.

How To Recycle Plastic



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Recycling plastic can get tricky because there are so many types. Best to find the [resin number](#) printed in a triangle on the product and confirm which numbers are accepted by your local recycling program. The [EPA](#) offers the following resin guidance:

- **No. 1 PET (polyethylene terephthalate):** Soda, juice and water bottles, fruit and vegetable clamshells, plastic peanut butter and mayonnaise jars.
- **No. 2 HDPE (high-density polyethylene):** Milk bottles, cleaning product bottles (especially harsh chemicals like bleach or ammonia), soap and shampoo bottles, laundry detergent bottles.
- **No. 3 PVC (polyvinyl chloride):** Yard signs, plumbing pipes, garden hoses and cables, toys and food wrap.
- **No. 4 LDPE (low-density polyethylene):** Dry cleaner bags, bread bags, zip-top bags and shopping bags.
- **No. 5 PP (polypropylene):** Food takeout containers, margarine and yogurt containers, straws, ice cream tubs, Tupperware and other plastic food containers and bottle caps.

- **No. 6 PS (polystyrene):** Styrofoam containers, packing peanuts, burger clamshells and coffee cup lids.
- **No. 7 Other (BPA, Lexan and polycarbonate):** Anything marked as “bioplastic” or “compostable plastic,” baby bottles and sippy cups, water cooler jugs, car parts and fibers.

How To Recycle Aluminum

[Aluminum](#) is one of the most recycled materials. It can be recycled repeatedly, according to [The Aluminum Association](#).

Cans (soda cans, paint cans, canned goods, aerosol cans) are typically recycled through curbside pickup and drop-off locations. Tabs and lids made of aluminum can also be recycled. Ask if aluminum foil, pie plates and trays are accepted.

Be sure to clean the items before placing them in the recycle bin. If foil is combined with other materials and can't be separated, then it needs to go in the garbage.

How To Recycle Glass



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Glass is also a common item recycled in curbside programs. Rinse out bottles, jars and containers to reduce contamination; remove plastic or metal lids; and avoid throwing broken glass in recycle bins for safety reasons.

Clear, green and amber glass is widely accepted. Ask your municipality about other color glass.

Other glass products like windows, windshield glass, eyeglasses, oven-safe dishes, Pyrex and mirrors can't be placed in a typical recycle bin. Ask about special recycling programs for these products. Unfortunately, frosted glass can't be recycled.

How To Recycle Fabric

Although most textiles are recyclable, few curbside recycling programs take them. Pre-consumer textiles (yarn and fabric) and post-consumer textiles (clothing, bed linens, cloth napkins, towels, etc.) can be recycled and turned into automobile cushions, insulation, paper, wiping cloths, carpet padding, baseball filling, pillow stuffing, pet beds and more.

Many thrift stores and consignment shops will take clothing. If they can't resell it, it goes off to a recycling facility. Brands like [Patagonia](#) and [Eileen Fisher](#) offer take-back programs. Also, check out [American Recyclers](#) and [TerraCycle](#).

Finally, you can search for textile recycling facilities near you, and ask if you can drop off your items directly.

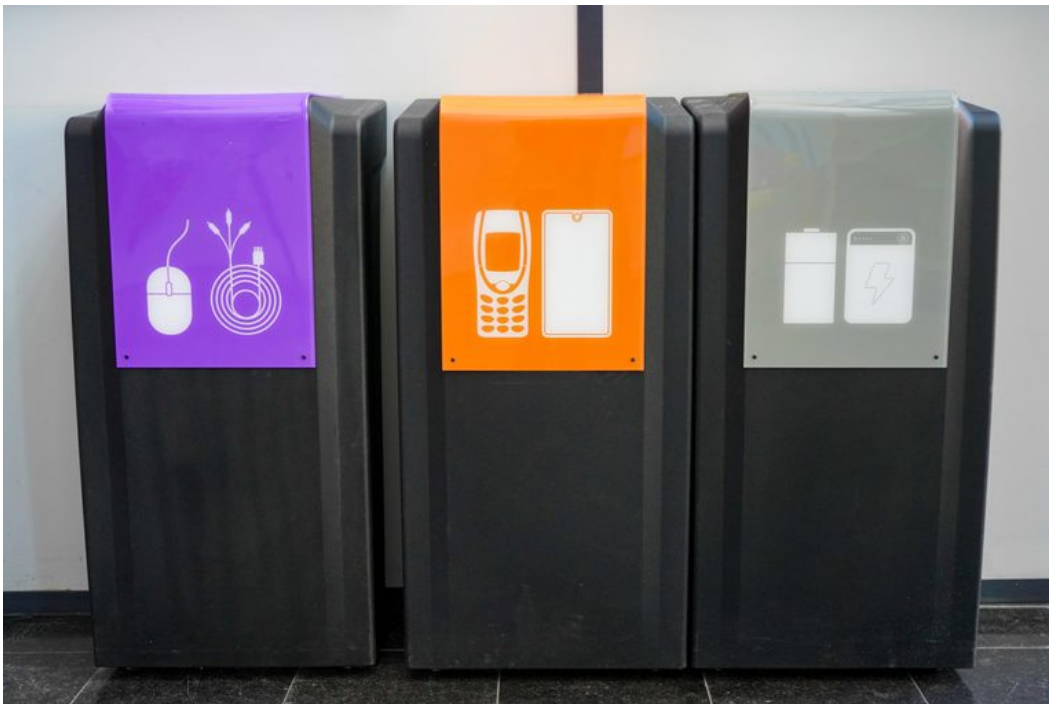
How To Recycle Batteries

Throwing away [batteries](#) in regular trash is a safety hazard. The [EPA](#) recommends they be recycled instead. Few municipalities allow residents to put batteries out with their weekly recycling, but many designate a drop-off location for them.

You may be asked to separate batteries by type (alkaline, lithium, or nickel metal hydride) and seal them in a clear plastic bag. Also, check with stores like The Home Depot and Lowe's.

For vehicle batteries, check with the car manufacturer, battery manufacturer, your local mechanic or local auto parts stores like AutoZone and O'Reilly. Finally, there are some mail-in programs as well: [Call2Recycle's smallest Battery & Cellphone Recycling Kit](#), [The EasyPak Micro Battery Recycling Container from TerraCycle Regulated Waste](#) and [Cirba Solutions WeRecycle Kits](#).

How To Recycle Electronics



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Small and large [electronics can be recycled](#), but not in your curbside recycle bin. Smaller ones like cell phones, tablet computers, MP3 players and digital cameras contain valuable metals like copper and gold, and lithium or nickel and cadmium batteries. Look for mail-back programs to recycle these products.

Large electronics that plug in like televisions, copiers, printers, audio receivers and amplifiers can also be recycled. Most electronics companies partner with retailers to make recycling convenient for consumers. [Best Buy](#), for one, allows customers to recycle up to three items per household per day.

How To Recycle Oil

Different types of oil can be recycled.

Once filtered and cleaned, cooking oil can be recycled to make cosmetics, stock feed and biodiesel. Store cooled oil in a glass jar for up to a month, then drop it off at a recycling center that accepts it.

Motor oil can also be recycled. Capture all the oil in its original container or one made of polyethylene. Store in a cool, dry place until you're ready to drop it off. Some curbside recycling programs will accept oil. If not, ask about a drop-off location. Also, check with [AutoZone](#) or other auto parts stores.

Keep in mind motor oil mixed with other fluids is not recyclable.

How To Recycle Yard Debris



LARISA STEFANUYK/GETTY IMAGES

Check if your municipality offers curbside yard waste recycling, or if you can take it to a local recycling center.

If your community offers green bin recycling for organic waste, you can throw in grass clippings, flowers, leaves, ivy, untreated wood and weeds. Do not put the following items in the green bin: soil, old

planter pots, animal feces, poison oak or ivy, rocks and treated wood. Place invasive species, harmful plants like poison ivy and diseased plants in the regular trash.

If all else fails, hire a yard cleanup service to collect the materials and make sure they're recycled.

How To Recycle Metal

Many types of metal can be recycled, including aluminum, steel, chromium, copper, lead, cadmium, iron, brass, nickel, tin, cast iron and zinc.

The following can't be recycled: metals containing mercury or lead; paint cans with traces of paint; pots and pans; propane gas tanks; and anything radioactive. Ask your local municipality about metal recycling. You could also sell it to a scrap yard or local scrap metal buyers so the material can be recycled, repurposed, donated or upcycled.

How To Recycle Tires



NIKOLAY CHEKALIN/GETTY IMAGES

Instead of your old tires ending up in a landfill or junkyard where they can leach toxins, recycle them. Tires have so many valuable components that can be reused — rubber, synthetic polymers, steel, textiles, fillers like carbon black and amorphous precipitated silica, anti-ozonants and curing systems like sulfur and zinc oxide.

Most curbside collection programs don't pick up tires with your regular recycling, so call your municipality for direction. If you have your tires changed at an auto shop or bicycle shop, ask if they'll recycle them.

How To Recycle Hazardous Waste

The EPA considers household products that are corrosive or toxic, or can catch fire, react, or explode, as [household hazardous waste](#).

These include automotive products like antifreeze, motor oil, oil filters, gasoline, polishes and waxes; batteries; electronics; fluorescent light bulbs and compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs); thermometers and thermostats with mercury; paint products; garden chemicals like pesticides, herbicides, fertilizer and insecticides; syringes and needles; swimming pool chemicals; and other household chemicals like toilet bowl cleaner, shower/tile cleaner, carpet cleaner and rust removers.

You can't place these items in your regular recycling bin. Instead, look for special collection events in your community or collection centers that accept hazardous household waste. There are also private collection services, like [WMAAtYourDoor.com](https://www.wmatyourdoor.com). See previous sections for more details.

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Sandi Schwartz is a multi-award-winning author of the book "Finding Ecohappiness: Fun Nature Activities to Help Your Kids Feel Happier and Calmer" and a freelance journalist specializing in sustainability, home and garden, green living, nature, and wellness. Her work has been featured in The Washington Post, National Geographic, Yahoo!, BobVila.com, Earth911, mindbodygreen, Verywell, and many more publications. She enjoys relaxing walks and bike rides, nature art, and her new meditation garden.

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