

How to Reduce Your Household Garbage

The average American throws away three and a half pounds of trash a day. If you were to make a hole the size of a [football](#) field and throw all of America's trash in a single year, the hole would have to be a hundred miles deep to fit it all in. And we're running out of landfill space—our landfills are closing at the rate of about one per day throughout the country. What can you do to help? Follow these tips to reduce your household garbage. About a third of America's trash consists of product packaging. So most of these tips are designed to help you reduce the amount of packaging you buy.

Look for minimum packaging. First and foremost, try to buy items with the least amount of packaging available.

Choose aluminum, tin, or paper. If you have to buy packaged goods—and it's nearly impossible not to—go with these three types of packaging, as they're easily recycled. Don't buy products packaged with a mix of materials—for example, paper with an aluminum lining. You can't recycle these.

Watch your plastic bags. Get your own bag and bring it with you to the grocery store. Millions of plastic bags are thrown away annually. If you have to use the grocery store's bags, don't let the clerk double or triple-bag anything.

Avoid plastic packaging. Plastic can be the toughest item to recycle, because many recycling centers don't process it.

Avoid disposables. In the twentieth century, manufacturers created a “disposable economy”—cheap products meant to be used once or twice and then thrown away. This translates into more money for companies—since you have to keep buying their things—and more waste in our landfills. Whenever possible, don't buy disposable products. Choose cloth napkins instead of paper, cloth diapers instead of disposables, metal and ceramic dinnerware instead of plastic and paper. Always use items that last.

Buy in bulk. The more you can buy in one package, the less packaging you'll waste. Whenever possible, buy in large amounts so you save on packaging.

Reuse when you can. When possible, put old packaging and goods to use. Glass jars can double as glasses, pencil holders, or storage containers. Plastic and paper bags can be reused when you go back to the grocery store. Plastic tubs can be reused as a replacement to Tupperware. Old [bedding](#) and clothes can be made into rags or rag rugs.

Borrow or rent—don't buy. If you only need a big ladder once a year or so—borrow it from a neighbor. Borrowing items you don't use every day can reduce your trash and the clutter in your home. If you need a big-ticket item like a steam cleaner, rent instead of buying.

Keep things in good repair. Many people throw out old things because of a fixable problem, or simply because they aren't wanted anymore. Don't throw out old shoes—take them to a shoe repair company. Get a ripped coat sewn. Don't throw out your old TV when you get a new one—give it to a thrift store. Whenever possible, give old clothes, shoes, and household items away to thrift stores instead of throwing them out—this way, a family in need can benefit from your old things, and you'll keep them out of the landfill.

Compost. Much of our landfills are full of leaves in plastic bags. The leaves are biodegradable—the bags aren't. When you do yardwork, the worst thing you can do is put your old leaves, grass clippings, and branches in a plastic bag and leave them on the curb. Instead, create a compost heap and decompose old yard waste. Your compost heap can become a healthy soil for your garden.

Recycle. Recycling has never been more important than it is today. Your cardboard, paper, glass, and aluminum can all be recycled—never throw old aluminum foil or cans in the garbage. If you don't have recycling in your neighborhood, start a recycling club—the funds you collect from turning in aluminum cans alone could pay for it.

Get off junk mailing lists. Many of us get lots of junk mail every day—and we automatically throw it away. It's a great idea to recycle this junk instead, but some envelopes are laminated or contain plastic. It's better to get yourself off these lists altogether. Call the companies that are sending you junk mail and ask to be taken off their lists.

We're running out of space in our landfills, and our trash problems will only continue to escalate if we don't come up with better ways to manage our waste. These tips will help you get a head start on cutting down on your household waste, and making your household greener.