

How Does One Person Make Any Difference? A Conversation about the Importance of Reducing, Composting, and Recycling

Reduce, reuse, recycle. How many times have we heard these three seemingly simple words? How many times have we decided to throw everything in the trash, instead? Is it the confusion over which items can be composted or are actually being recycled that stops us, or the time it takes to take out the food products to the compost bin or rinse out the container and place it in the recycle bin? Or, rather, is it the justification we tell ourselves that one less plastic container will not help an overly polluted world? No matter the “rationale,” the most recent data from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) begs us to find a way to reduce the harm we cause the planet.

Reduce/Reuse: Here are some simple changes you can make in your life to REDUCE the use of resources.

Grass Clippings:

When cutting your grass, seek to leave 3-4 inches height in grass. This will allow the grass to retain the moisture for the hot summer months and eliminate the need to water your turf. When cutting the grass, no need to bag it, you can either leave it on the grass as a mulch or spread it around your trees and garden beds in the fall. The grass will decompose and enrich the soil. When selecting a lawn mower, consider buying a battery operated one which usually comes with a mulch attachment which will chop up the grass into little pieces.

Plastics:

Skip the bag. How many times have we watched a person have their items placed in a plastic bag, only to remove it before leaving the store and that single-use bag goes into the trash, or worse yet, ends up in the gutter and eventually in our waterways. Do you really need that bag? No bag please works wonders.

Carry reusable bags to the store.

Don't consume bottled water; rather, carry your own bottle and fill it up. It is quite common now to see fountains allowing you to fill up your own bottle. Even airport terminals all have water refill stations (just make sure the bottle is empty before going through security). In addition to helping the environment, refusing to consume bottled water saves you money.

Look for containers that have bottle deposits. For example, some local dairy farms produce milk in glass bottles that you can return to the store when it's empty for the glass to be cleaned, sanitized and reused. The cost is generally small. (typically \$1 or \$2 total to be refunded once the bottle is returned for good). But the reduction of waste is immense.

Bring your own mug to the coffee shop. Ask for your drink without a straw, and only take the napkins that you need (the stack that you receive often is unnecessary).

Turn off the lights, turn down the AC, take shorter showers, and unplug the appliances you are not using. An appliance plugged in is still using energy. Replace your light bulbs with LED light bulbs.

Combine your errands so you are not driving as much. Walk more, ride a bike, or use available public transit options.

Buy local. A large part of a product's carbon footprint comes from transportation. Purchasing goods that are grown or produced locally not only reduces the amount of emissions that product is responsible for, but also supports the local economy.

These seemingly small individual efforts will add up and contribute to lowering environmental pollution over time.

Reduce/Compost: "Composting is turning food and yard waste into a nutrient-rich product to improve soil and plant health.

Why compost?

1. Composting reduces the amount of waste going to landfills and incinerators.
2. Compost is a free soil amendment that saves gardeners money.
3. Compost improves soil structure, aeration, and water-holding capacity and contains a wide range of plant nutrients.
4. Compost can reduce some soil-borne diseases in your garden.
5. Compost “feeds” the soil food web for healthier plants.”¹

Any gardener or farmer will tell you the benefits of composting for amending the soil with organic material. St. Ignatius supports composting 100%. Nearly everything you touch at the refreshments after the 10:00 a.m. mass on Sunday is compostable. Volunteer parishioners take the compostable material to [MOM's Organic Market](#), and you can as well.

Now, we have to make sure the compostable material is placed in the right bin. Look for the signs to direct you to the proper bin, and if confused, ask. It is up to us to make sure when we are unable to reduce our use of resources, we can resume them by composting. Soon the material will be transformed into rich organic material that can be used in our garden and on our farms.

You can also compost at home. Practically any plant material can be composted, such as sod, grass clippings, hay, straw, weeds, sawdust, shredded newspaper, cardboard, and hedge clippings. However, it is best not to use deceased plants or vegetables. In the fall, you can use tree leaves to begin your composting system. Instead of bagging the leaves, which are organic matter, compost them or shred them and use them as mulch in your garden beds or around your trees. No need to bag them and send them to the landfill!

¹ University of Maryland Extension Composting a Master Gardener Program

Most kitchen waste may be added to your compost, with the exception of grease, fat, oil, fish, meat and dairy products. Also, do not add dog or cat manure.

Most non glossy paper like newsprint and tablet paper, as well as cardboard boxes and paper egg cartons, will decompose and are safe to use. Coated or treated paper products may contain chemicals that inhibit decomposition or plant growth.

All of the products should be mixed thoroughly in your compost pile or turned in the compost tumbler.

Material as to how to compost is readily available on the internet or at the local library.

Recycle: At the end of the day, recycling should be the last step, not the first. However, for many, it is our way of contributing.

For your assistance, please find a summary of the recycling programs in Baltimore City, Baltimore, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties.

Baltimore City

Items that are recyclable:

- **Aerosol Cans** (empty)
- **Aluminum:** cans, beverage and food containers, foil (clean), and pie pans
- **Books:** hardbound, paperback and textbooks
- **Bottles:** narrow-neck bottles used for food liquids, soap, soda or water— (lightly clean if heavily soiled)
- **Cardboard and paperboard boxes** corrugated boxes, egg containers, food boxes, but there should be no food residue on the box, such as pizza boxes boxes (including cereal boxes), frozen food packaging, mailing boxes, and oversized boxes

- **Cartons (waxed):** used for a liquid such as juices, milk or soups
- **Glass containers** such as bottles and jars (please rinse)
- **Juice Boxes** (clean)
- **Mail:** envelopes with plastic windows
- **Metal:** beverage and food containers
- **Paper (all colors and types):** catalogs, folders, junk mail, magazines, mixed paper, newsprint (all types), non-metallic wrapping paper, office papers, printer paper, school papers and shredded paper
- **Plastic:** bottles and jars with symbols #1 through #7 (narrow neck and screw top—lightly clean if heavily soiled) -e.g., detergent/bleach bottles, juice bottles, milk jugs, soda bottles, water bottles. Containers with symbols #1 through #7 (wide-mouthed—lightly clean if heavily soiled) -e.g., cottage cheese, margarine, mayonnaise, sour cream and yogurt (caps and labels o.k.). Drinking cups and prescription bottles, including lids and caps.
- **Steel:** beverage containers and food (scrap metal is not accepted for curbside Recycle Pick-up, but may be recycled at our
- **Tin:** cans and foil

Unacceptable Recycling Material:

- Carry out or deli food containers
- Cat litter
- Chemicals
- Cookware and plates (plastic)
- Containers of toxic substances -e.g., bottles, cans motor oil, pesticides, etc.
- Contaminated paper products -e.g., napkins, paper towels, waxed paper, paper plates and tissue
- Contaminated plastic products -e.g., plates, utensils, cookware, to-go cartons
- Dry-cleaning bags
- Food Waste
- Furniture of any kind
- Glass (window and mirror)
- Paint and paint cans

- Plastic bags including grocery and newspaper covers
- Utensils (plastic)
- Waxed paper
- Styrofoam

ELECTRONICS (excluding TVs and monitors): At Citizen Drop-Off Centers

Source: <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/recycling-services>

Baltimore County

- **PAPER & CARDBOARD:** newspapers, magazines, phone books, catalogs, books, writing & computer paper, mail, paperboard (cereal, frozen food, shoeboxes), cardboard (flattened), milk cartons, juice boxes.
- **NOT ALLOWED:** paper/cardboard covered by wax, plastic, or food; facial tissues, napkins, paper towels, foil gift-wrap.
- **METAL & GLASS:** aluminum & steel food and beverage cans, empty aerosol cans, aluminum foil, aluminum pie pans, glass bottles, jars.
- **NOT ALLOWED:** propane cylinders, pots & pans, scrap metal, dishes & cookware, ceramics, drinking glasses, light bulbs, mirrors, crystal.
- **PLASTIC:** narrow-neck plastic bottles & jugs, wide-mouth plastic containers (e.g. butter, cottage cheese, peanut butter, yogurt containers), rigid plastics (e.g. buckets, drinking cups, flower pots, kiddie pools, toys, etc.)
- **NOT ALLOWED:** plastic bags, Styrofoam, “clam shells” (salad containers, packaging for toys & batteries), CD jewel cases, motor oil containers, VHS tapes.
- **ELECTRONICS** (excluding TVs and monitors): @ Drop-off facilities

Source: www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/publicworks/rec...

Howard County

- **PAPER:** drink boxes, milk cartons, newspaper and inserts, paper, food/snack boxes, books, cards, non-foil gift wrap, catalogs,

magazines, junkmail, phone books, bagged shredded paper, three-ring binders, cardboard (flattened to less than 4' x 6')

- **NOT ALLOWED:** paper towels, tissues, napkins, soiled plates, foil gift wrap, ice cream containers, wax paper, laminated paper, non-tear papers
- **PLASTIC** bottles, tubs, jars, trays, disposable cups and plates, flower pots, toys, buckets, bundled plastic bags
- **NOT ALLOWED:** Styrofoam (take to Alpha Ridge), plastic clam shells, jewel cases, CDs or DVDs, motor oil or pesticide bottles, VHS tapes, plastic electronics, juice pouches, crinkly wrappers from snacks and chips, , beach or lawn chairs
- **CANS:** aluminum/steel cans, empty aerosol cans, aluminum foil, pie and cake pans
- **NOT ALLOWED:** propane cylinders, pots and pans, scrap metal
- **GLASS:** bottles, jars
- **NOT ALLOWED:** window glass, drinking glasses, mirrors, ceramics, crystal, cookware, light bulbs

Source: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/curbsidecollections#recycling>

Anne Arundel County

Recyclable Items:

- Antifreeze
- Appliances with chemical refrigerants
 - Must call (410) 222-6100 to schedule Bulk Metal or Appliance pick up
- Batteries (Lead-acid)
- Cardboard
- Clothing and Textiles
- Containers, fuel, and oil tanks
 - Must be dry and empty
- Cooking Oil (Liquid)
- Dishwasher (metal)
 - Only with metal door and tub
 - Must call (410) 222-6100 to schedule Bulk Metal or Appliance pick up
- Drum Containers and Fuel & Oil Tanks
 - Must be dry and empty

- Electronics
 - CD and DVD players, radios, stereos, VCRs, CPUs, computer mice, keyboards, cell phones, printers, power supplies, laptops, scanners, computer cables and cords, circuit boards, chips, cards, other computer or electronic related accessories, and holiday string lights.
 - TVs and Computer Monitors are not accepted for recycling
- E-ZPass Transponder
- Fire Extinguishers
- Fluorescent Tubes and Bulbs
- Food Scraps and Food-Soiled Paper
- Glass Bottles and Jars
- Helium Tanks
- Holiday and Novelty String Lights
- Household Recyclables
- Medical Equipment (Durable)
- Motor Oil
- Oyster and Clam Shells
- Pallets (Plastic)
- Pallets (Wood)
- Plastic Bags, Wrap, and Film
- Propane tanks
- Rubble
- Scrap metal
- Tires
- Vinyl siding
- Yard Waste

NOT ALLOWED:

- Ammunition and Firearms
- Animal Feed Bags
- Antifreeze - contaminated
- Asbestos Items (Shingles and Tiles)
- Asphalt shingles (NO Asbestos)
- Batteries (Rechargeable or Single-use)
- Building and Construction Debris
- Carbon paper
- Carpet
- Charcoal Briquettes

- Coal and Ashes
- Compressed Gas Tanks
- Cooking Grease (Solid)
- CPAP Therapy Machine
- Dead Animals or Carcasses
- Dirt/Soil
- Dishwasher (plastic)
- Drinking glasses
- Explosives
- Fireworks
- Flares
- Furniture
- Glass mirrors
- Household Hazardous Waste
- Liquids
- Medical Waste - Commercially Generated

Sources:

- <https://www.aacounty.org/departments/public-works/waste-management/recycling/>
- https://www.aacounty.org/departments/public-works/waste-management/Materials_Accepted/

General considerations to follow when recycling regardless of the county include:

1. Plastic bags of any size are not recyclable and should never be placed in a recycle bin.
2. Plastic food containers, including utensils, plates and to-go containers that have food tracings are not recyclable, but they may be compostable if they are plant based.
3. Soft drink cups and straws are not recyclable, but they may be compostable if they are plant based.
4. All Items need to be dry and clean.
5. Pizza boxes are not recyclable.

6. Hazardous material is not appropriate for curbside pickup but may be accepted on designated days. (Call your county recycling program or Department of Public Works)