

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 2024-12-05
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REDUCE, REUSE AND RECYCLE WASTE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



Learn how to reduce food waste and what can and can't be recycled this holiday season. *Photo credit: iStock/Robin Gentry*

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is offering tips to help families save money, reduce waste and keep recycling and trash workers safe during upcoming holidays.

“We know recycling can be confusing,” said Jennifer Semrau, DNR waste reduction and diversion coordinator. “But there are some basic tips people can use to make tackling holiday waste less overwhelming. Knowing the right thing to do with things like batteries and light strings can prevent damage to recycling facilities and keep workers safe.”

WHAT SHOULD GO IN YOUR RECYCLING BIN

Many items can be recycled anywhere in Wisconsin. These items, which the state bans from landfills, include:

- Cardboard – Flatten boxes before putting them in carts or bins so that recycling equipment can handle them properly
- Newspaper
- Magazines
- Office paper
- Plastic #1 and #2 containers
- Aluminum cans
- Steel (tin) cans
- Glass bottles and jars

Be sure containers are empty of liquids and excess gunk and give them a quick rinse. They don't need to be spotless, but they should be mostly clean. Don't crush or flatten cans or bottles going into a curbside recycling cart or container – this makes it harder for equipment at recycling facilities to recognize and properly sort things like aluminum cans.

Some recycling programs accept wrapping paper that can be torn and doesn't have any glitter, foil, ribbons or other adornments, but others don't accept any wrapping paper because of the risk of contamination from non-recyclable coatings and decorations. Most communities accept junk mail and other mixed paper, such as cereal boxes.

Check locally for a complete list of what your program accepts, and don't rely on packaging labels. Keep in mind that what you can recycle at a relative's home may be different than what you can recycle at your own.

WHAT SHOULD NOT GO IN YOUR RECYCLING BIN

Some items can cause serious problems at recycling facilities that aren't designed to handle them, including a risk of fire and worker injury. Many of these can be recycled at drop-off sites but should not go in curbside recycling bins or carts. These include:

- **Holiday light strings, cords and other "tangles."** At modern recycling facilities, these wrap around equipment, meaning a facility has to be shut down for workers to cut the material loose. Some retailers, electronics recyclers and communities

offer seasonal recycling programs for light strings. If that's not an option, put broken lights in the trash.

- **Plastic bags, plastic film and wrap.** These also get tangled in recycling equipment. In addition, bagged recyclables cause problems because workers can't be sure what's inside, meaning recyclables in bags will likely end up in the trash. If you collect cans, bottles and other recyclables in a bag to reduce mess, empty the bag into your bin or cart and then put the bag in the trash. You can take many types of clean, dry plastic bags and wrap to store drop-off locations. Learn more about reducing, reusing and recycling plastic bags and wrap on the DNR's [Recycling Plastic Bags webpage](#).
- **Batteries and electronics.** Recycling facilities that manage cans, bottles and cardboard and waste facilities that manage household garbage aren't set up to handle batteries and electronics. Rechargeable batteries can cause fires in collection trucks and facilities if they are damaged by equipment, and many electronics contain hazardous materials. Find more on how to recycle batteries and electronics, including drop-off site locations, on the DNR's [Electronics Recycling webpage](#).
- **Tissue paper.** While not a hazard, the fibers in this type of paper are too short to be recycled and reused again.
- **Photo cards and cards that play music, light up or have glitter or ribbons.** These cards may contain batteries, which are a fire risk, or nonrecyclable material that contaminates other paper.

For more information about what can and can't be recycled, visit the DNR's [What to Recycle in Wisconsin webpage](#).

SAVE MONEY WITH FOOD WASTE PREVENTION TIPS

The organization ReFED estimates that on Thanksgiving alone, 316 million pounds of food is wasted in the United States. This represents more than \$556 million of groceries thrown away in a single day.

When this wasted food decomposes in landfills, it will release nearly 5,000 metric tons of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. This is similar to what's emitted by powering 26,000 homes' electricity for a year.

Here are some tips to prevent and reduce food waste at home.

- **Understand date labels and when food items are actually unsafe.** Date labels are NOT regulated by federal law and do not indicate food safety, with the exception of infant formula. Manufacturers provide dates to help consumers and retailers decide when food is of peak quality. The U.S. Department of Agriculture advises consumers to examine foods to determine if the quality is sufficient for use. Relying on your eyes and an old-fashioned sniff test can be a better indicator of whether food is good to eat and help you avoid disposing of healthy and safe food.

That jar of nutmeg from last year is most likely still good, so you might be able to avoid repurchasing some special holiday food items.

- **Shop with a plan and prepare for gatherings.** Buying more food than what is needed often leads to more food waste. You can reduce this problem by taking inventory of what you already have, planning meals and making detailed shopping lists. Save the Food's free portion planner, [The Guest-imator](#), can help you estimate how much you need to prepare for gatherings. You can share leftovers by having containers on hand to send guests home with their favorites.
- **Store food to extend its life.** Proper food storage can reduce waste and save the time and money associated with additional grocery store runs. [Save the Food's Store It Guide](#) gives ideas on how to organize your fridge and offers tips and tricks for storing food.
- **Freeze before you toss.** Consider putting your holiday leftovers and surplus ingredients in the freezer before it's too late. Freezing food is like hitting the pause button and preserves the food until you are ready to eat it. Extra eggs can be removed from their shell and frozen. Vegetable scraps, extra meat and bones can be frozen and used later for soup stock.

For more details and additional tips, visit the DNR's [Reducing Food Waste at Home webpage](#).

Find more information on reducing household waste during the holidays on the DNR's [Recycling and Waste Reduction webpage](#).

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