

Outdoor living and transportation



Taking care of your vehicles and your yard can result in a lot of waste that is not recyclable and may be hazardous. Garages can also become a storage locker for all of the stuff that doesn't have a place inside the house. However, you can reduce your impact by keeping your vehicles and yard-care equipment in good shape and choosing greener options for yard care. You can also re-home the stuff that's no longer wanted or needed.

Green auto tips

Fix leaks

Keep an eye on the ground underneath your vehicle and make sure to have leaks fixed. If you do have an oil spill, soak it up with clay cat litter or sawdust rather than chemical cleaners. If you want to remove the stain, use dish soap and a small amount of hot water. Be sure to absorb the oily liquid and put it in a container. Oil and gasoline-soaked rags and absorbents should be stored in a small, airtight, non-combustible (such as metal) container with a tight-fitting lid. An old paint can is a good example. The sealed can should be disposed of at a Hennepin County drop-off facility.

Changing your oil

If you change your oil at home, bring used oil and filters to a local auto shop for recycling. Store your used oil in a clearly labeled plastic container with a tight fitting cap. You can also bring used oil to a Hennepin County drop-off facility. Never put your used oil, filters, or oil-soaked cloths in the trash.

When you buy oil for an oil change, look for re-refined (aka recycled) oil. To guarantee this oil has the same specifications as virgin oil, look for the API Certification mark.

Washing your car

The best way to clean your car is to bring it to a car wash. Car wash facilities are required by law to treat dirty water before it is released into storm sewer systems that enter lakes, streams and rivers. They also tend to use less water per wash than a person using a hose. If you do wash your car at home, make sure to do it on grass, dirt or gravel so the soap and greasy grime don't run directly into your storm drains.

Cleaning the interior

To clean and refresh carpets and upholstery, sprinkle on baking soda and let it set for at least 30 minutes before vacuuming it up. Wipe down internal surfaces with a damp cloth and skip the chemical detailing products.



Car alternatives

Reduce your vehicle usage by biking, taking mass transit, or participating in a rideshare, car rental or other transportation rental program. The Twin Cities have several options for short term car, bike, or scooter rentals, whether you need to get yourself somewhere, run errands, or move larger items.

Biking

When shopping for a bicycle, try to find one used. Local bike shops can be resources, and many used bikes are listed on online marketplaces.

Maintaining your bike will ensure a long-lasting, low-carbon mode of transportation and recreation. Be sure to clean and perform basic maintenance on your bike routinely and especially before storing it for the winter.

Reduce waste in the garage

Take the following steps to prevent waste in your garage:

- Donate or sell old or unused items such as bikes, tools, plant containers, and sports equipment on a regular schedule so you don't end up throwing them away many years down the road when they might be obsolete.
- Keep cars, motorcycles, lawn mowers, and other lawn equipment with engines tuned up so they last a long time without needing to be replaced.
- Share tools with your neighbors or become a member of a tool library. The Minnesota Tool Library has more than 5,000 tools for its members to borrow. Learn more at mntoollibrary.org.
- Plan for winter by draining and bringing in hoses so they don't burst, covering or storing lawn furniture so it doesn't fade or crack, and making sure you don't let any chemicals or paints stored in the garage freeze.

Lower waste lawn care



The way we care for our yards makes a difference, and implementing sustainable landscaping techniques can save money and time, protect our health and benefit the environment. A healthy, vigorous lawn needs less watering and less maintenance. Let your lawn grow a little higher, keep mower blades sharp, leave grass clippings on the lawn, and water less often but more deeply.

Rather than grass, consider using native plants that benefit pollinators and beautify your yard. There are also ground covers and sedges that can be planted that require low or no mowing.

You can pull weeds by hand or use vinegar to kill plants growing in your sidewalk or driveway cracks. You can also use compost to fertilize gardens. Consider buying mulch, soil and compost in bulk to avoid plastic bags. Look for recycled-content plastic landscaping products, such as edging and timbers, as well as patio furniture. There are several local companies that make these products from recycled milk jugs.

Avoid poisons, pesticides and fertilizers when at all possible, and make sure that you read labels for proper storage. Remember to keep all hazardous products out of reach of children and animals. Keep products in the original containers and make sure the labels and safety information are legible. Cloths soaked in oil, gasoline, oil-based stain and varnish, turpentine, linseed oil, or other hazardous materials should be collected in a tight fitting, nonflammable container and taken to a Hennepin County drop-off facility. See the How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home guide at hennepin.us/residents/recycling-hazardous-waste/reduce-household-hazardous-waste for more details.

Water management



Managing stormwater and surface water helps the environment by reducing flooding, erosion and pollution. For stormwater diversion, you can use a rain barrel to capture rain water, install a rain garden to capture runoff to divert it from the storm drain, or install permeable pavers so rain can soak into the ground rather than run into the stormwater system. Adopting a storm drain (mn.adopt-a-drain.org) and committing to keeping it clean is another way to help reduce pollution in local bodies of water.