

Zero Waste Guide

Tips and tricks for a low-waste lifestyle



Welcome to the Zero Waste Challenge! This guide includes information about many actions you can take to reduce waste. The guide also includes planning worksheets, templates, and do-it-yourself recipes to assist and inspire you in setting goals, changing habits, and making progress.

Developing low-waste habits is a gradual process. Start with actions that make sense for you and your family. Focus on what will motivate you and the others in your household – whether that be improving your health, saving money, or protecting the environment. Try different actions to find what works for you, and build on your successes to keep slashing your trash bit by bit.



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Getting started: diverting waste



Congratulations on starting your zero-waste journey!

A good place to start is to look at what you take out to your bin(s) and get everything possible out of your trash can. This section contains basic information about properly getting rid of your waste through recycling, composting, donation, and hazardous waste disposal.

Before making any changes, you will learn about what your household throws out by doing a waste audit. Use the waste audit and waste sort worksheets on pages 55-59 to discover what ends up in your trash and identify areas for improvement.

If you have a specific item to get rid of and can't find disposal information here, check out the Hennepin County Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide or call Hennepin County Environment and Energy at 612-348-3777.

Conduct a waste audit

Conducting a waste audit may sound strange, but taking a close look at the waste your household generates can be one of the most eye-opening and important steps in reducing your waste. You may find that you're doing a great job of recycling in the kitchen but not in other areas of the house. Or maybe you thought you didn't throw out any food waste, but find that you let several containers of food spoil in the back of the refrigerator this week. Once you become familiar with what you are throwing away, you will become more conscious about how your everyday actions result in avoidable waste and what areas to focus on for improvement.

Start your zero-waste journey by looking into all of your waste containers and noting the contents or doing a full-scale waste sort. This will establish a baseline to measure your progress against. See the waste sort guide on page 58 for instructions.

Get everyone on board

All members of your household who throw away trash should be involved in your zero-waste project. Even young kids can help! Rely on each other for support, education, accountability, and maybe even competition throughout the process.



Set up for success

Make it easy to recycle by setting up a designated bin for recycling and organics instead of using a temporary fix (paper or plastic bags can easily be confused for trash and may not be replaced after someone takes it to the curb). Make sure you have containers wherever necessary, including in the kitchen, laundry room, bathroom, office, and bedrooms. If the correct option requires you to walk to another room, recyclables may end up in the trash!

Get container labels to help all family members and guests understand your recycling system. Stickers with images can help them know what to put in the bins. Order free container labels at hennepin.us/recycling.

Recycle and compost everything you can (the right way)

Most people don't realize just how much of their waste can be recycled or composted. Brush up on your knowledge of what to put in the recycling cart and your backyard compost pile or organics collection container. Confused about what is different between the methods? Keep reading! We'll start with the basics of regular recycling.



Recycling 101

Recent news about recycling have a lot of people wondering if recycling actually works. Here in the Twin Cities, you can be assured the recycling you put in your cart is getting recycled as long as the materials are accepted in your program and prepared properly. Minnesota state law requires this. There continues to be a demand for our recycled materials, and recyclers continue to invest in new technology to make recycling more advanced and efficient. The best ways to support recycling are to refresh your knowledge of what can be recycled, only recycle items that are accepted, and keep stuff that isn't accepted out.

Do recycle

Paper

- Mail, office, and school papers
- Magazines and catalogs
- Newspapers and inserts
- Phone books



Boxes:

- Cardboard
- Cereal and cracker boxes
- Shoe boxes, gift boxes, and electronics boxes
- Toothpaste, medication, and other toiletry boxes



Cartons

- Milk cartons
- Juice boxes
- Soup, broth, and wine cartons



Glass

- Food and beverage bottles and jars



Plastic (#1, 2, 5)

Bottles and jugs:

- Water, soda, and juice bottles
- Milk and juice jugs
- Ketchup and salad dressing bottles
- Dishwashing liquid bottles and detergent jugs
- Shampoo, soap, and lotion bottles

Cups and containers:

- Yogurt, pudding, and fruit cups
- Clear disposable cups and bowls*
- Margarine, cottage cheese, and other tubs
- Produce, deli and takeout containers*

Metal

- Food and beverage cans
- Clean aluminum foil and pans



Don't recycle:

- Aerosol cans
- Batteries
- Black plastic
- Containers that held hazardous products (such as oil, paint, and pesticides)
- Glass or ceramic dishes, drinking glasses, and vases
- Gift wrap that is shiny or contains glitter or foil
- Hoses, cords, and string lights
- Large plastic items like laundry baskets, storage tubs, and toys
- Microwavable food trays
- Paper cups and plates**
- Paper soiled with food, such as pizza boxes from delivery, napkins, and paper towels**
- Plastic bags (accepted in many drop-off locations such as grocery and department stores)
- Plastic foam (Styrofoam™)
- Plastic utensils and straws
- Random metal items like pots, pipes, and hangers*
- Window glass and mirrors

* These items are recyclable in some cities. Contact your city recycling coordinator for details. Find your city recycling coordinator's contact information at hennepin.us/recycling

** These items may be accepted in organics recycling.

If you're not sure an item can be recycled, check the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/green-disposal-guide or throw it in the trash.

Preparing your recycling

- Don't bag your recyclables – place them loose in your recycling cart.
- Items should be clean and empty – give them a quick rinse before recycling.
- Leave plastic caps on plastic bottles. Do not place caps in the bin on their own.
- Metal caps can be collected in a metal can – when it's full, carefully squeeze the top of the can shut and place it in your recycling.
- Remove pumps from spray bottles.
- Flatten boxes.
- Don't crush containers like milk jugs, juice cartons or cans. With modern sorting equipment, uncrushed containers are more likely to end up in the right spot.

Knowing what plastics to recycle

Plastics are confusing because of the huge variety of types and ways in which they are used. There are seven types of plastics, and packaging that is new to both consumers and recyclers is constantly showing up on store shelves.

The number you find on plastic items, often in what looks like a recycling symbol, is called the resin code. The resin code helps recyclers and consumers know what type of plastic an item is made of. It does not mean the item is recyclable, though it can help you figure it out.

In general, you can recycle plastic bottles, jugs, cups, and containers that are #1, 2, and 5 that are not black and have not held hazardous chemicals. There are strong markets to recycle these plastics into new products.

See the plastics recycling decision guide for more help in determining if a plastic item is recyclable.



Avoid wish-cycling

At some point, we've all probably put something in our recycling cart or dumpster that we weren't sure was actually recyclable. This is sometimes called "wish-cycling."

Although you may want to recycle everything, the best thing you can do to support recycling is to only recycle the items accepted in your program. These items can be sorted properly at recycling facilities and made into new products.

Next time you're questioning if something is recyclable, first check your city's accepted recycling guide. Otherwise, remember the phrase "when in doubt, throw it out."

This will help ensure that recycling facilities get items that can be recycled and minimize the amount of non-recyclable items, otherwise known as contaminants, that they receive.

Some of the items that are not accepted for recycling can damage equipment at recycling facilities, harm employees at those facilities, or do not have strong markets to be turned into new products. This is why it's important to keep these items out. The following pages include important items to keep out of the recycling and what to do with them instead.



Important items to keep out of your recycling cart (and what to do instead)

Plastic bags



Plastic bags and wrap get tangled in the equipment at recycling sorting facilities and workers spend hours each day removing them. Plastic bags and wrap can be recycled if brought back to a retail drop-off location.

Keep your plastic bags separate and bring them to collection bins at the front of stores such as Cub Foods, Goodwill, JCPenney, Lunds & Byerlys, Kohl's, Kowalski's Markets, Target, Walmart, and metro area food co-ops. Plastic bags are also accepted in the subscription recycling program by Ridwell (ridwell.com)

Many types of plastic bags are accepted, including: retail, carryout, produce, newspaper, bread, dry cleaning, plastic storage baggies, bubble wrap and air pillows (deflate), product wrapping on paper towels and bathroom tissue. Bags must be empty, clean, and dry. Learn more at plasticfilmrecycling.org.

Bags of recycling



Recycling in bags doesn't get properly sorted at the recycling facility because recyclers can't tell what's in the bag and don't have time to open and sort it. Make sure to place your recycling loose in your recycling cart.

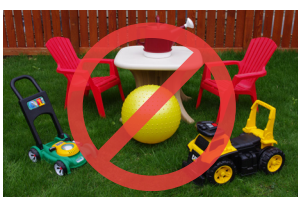
Black plastic



Black plastic cannot be recycled, no matter what type of plastic it is. The optical sorting equipment at recycling facilities cannot identify black plastic because it absorbs

light instead of reflecting it. Additionally, black plastic has little value because it cannot be dyed to create a new color and, therefore, can be used in fewer ways. Put black plastic items of any kind in the trash.

Large plastic items



Large plastic items like laundry baskets, storage bins, lawn furniture, plastic toys, and other large plastic items can't be recycled. There are not good markets for recycling these items,

and it is not possible to sort them at recycling facilities. Purchase high-quality items, use them for as long as possible, and donate items that are in good shape when you're ready to get rid of them. Put large plastic items that are broken and not repairable in the trash.

Random metal items



Random metal items such as pots and pans, pipes, hangers, and tools can damage equipment and harm workers at recycling facilities. All metal can be recycled, just not in your recycling cart at

home. Take random metal items to a scrap metal recycler; find locations on the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide.

Pressurized tanks



Cylinders and tanks contain a compressed gas that makes them explosive and potential fire hazards.

It is illegal to put propane tanks, helium tanks, and other pressurized cylinders in your household recycling or trash. Properly dispose of all pressurized cylinders; find options on the Green Disposal Guide.

Single-use plastic utensils and straws



Plastic utensils and straws are too small and difficult to sort at recycling facilities, and there aren't good recycling markets for them. Avoid them by choosing reusable options or refusing them when you can.

Paper plates, cups, and takeout containers



Paper cups, plates, and takeout containers can't be recycled because they are often lined with plastic or contaminated with food. These items can be placed in the organics recycling if they are BPI

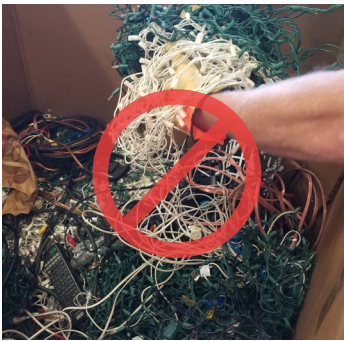
certified compostable (see organics recycling 101 to learn more). Avoid disposable containers by choosing reusable cups, mugs and plates.

Electronics and batteries



Electronics and batteries can't be sorted properly at recycling facilities, and certain batteries can cause fires at facilities. Batteries and electronics should be recycled at drop-off locations. Learn options for batteries and electronics on the Green Disposal Guide.

Cords and string lights



Keep "tangles" like cords, hoses and string lights out of your recycling bin. As the name suggests, these items get tangled in the equipment at recycling facilities. You can recycle cords and string lights at Hennepin County drop-off facilities. Learn more on the Green Disposal Guide.

Needles and sharps



Needles and sharps should be managed and disposed of safely to prevent injury and disease transmission from needle-sticks. They should never be placed in your

recycling cart. Learn about disposal options on the Green Disposal Guide.

Small items

Anything smaller than the size of your fist will not go through the recycling process well. Small items fall through the cracks of the sorting process and can end up contaminating other recycling streams, especially glass.

What happens to your recycling

Recycling starts at the curb with you separating your recyclables from trash so they can be picked up by your hauler.

The next step is processing. Haulers bring the recyclables to material recovery facilities (MRFs) to be sorted, graded, cleaned, and prepared for markets. Materials are sorted to remove contaminants that may damage processing equipment and graded to reclaim higher-value materials.

Various methods are used at MRFs to sort materials. Mechanical processes such as magnets, air jets, and screens use physical differences among materials, such as weight or magnetism, to sort them. Hand-sorting is used to sort materials that the mechanical methods cannot.

After the recyclables are processed at the MRF, the materials are sold to manufacturers that make them into a wide variety of new products. Paper is turned into a pulp and recycled back into paper, newspaper, boxes, napkins, paper towels, egg cartons and more. Glass is crushed, heated and recycled into glass bottles and jars or used in insulation, floor tile, road construction projects and more. Steel or aluminum is heated, melted and recycled back into steel or aluminum cans. Plastics are shredded, melted and recycled into a variety of products, including plastic bottles, carpet, furniture, clothing and more.

The final step in the recycling process is closing the recycling loop by buying products made from recycled materials.



Composting and organics recycling 101

Composting is a microbial process that converts waste from your kitchen and yard into a nutrient-rich soil amendment or mulch. Gardeners have used compost for centuries to improve their soil and to supply essential nutrients to help plants grow.

Hennepin County residents have two main options for turning food waste into compost - backyard composting and organics recycling. Depending on program availability and personal preference, some people use one method, while others use both. Since you can include different materials in each, choose what works for your household!

Backyard composting

Backyard composting involves creating a pile of organic materials that break down into compost in your yard. The pile usually needs to be contained in some way, so check your city's ordinances or ask your city recycling coordinator.

Pros:

- ✓ Great way to recycle yard waste such as plant trimmings and leaves as well as fruit and vegetable scraps right at home.
- ✓ Provides the biggest environmental benefit because you're managing waste at home and avoiding all of the energy that goes into picking up and processing waste.
- ✓ Get free compost to use in your garden.
- ✓ Can be used as a learning activity for kids.

Cons

- Cannot include meat, oils, dairy products, or certain compostable items (such as certified compostable cups, bags, take-out containers and utensils).
- Requires maintenance that some people find burdensome.



Organics recycling

Organics recycling involves collecting food scraps, non-recyclable paper, and certified compostable products in compostable bags and placing your bagged organics out for pick up as part of your waste service, similar to recycling and trash, or taking them to a drop-off location. Your organics are brought to a commercial composting facility and turned into nutrient-rich compost.

Pros:

- ✓ Can include all food waste, including bones and dairy, as well as compostable paper and compostable plastics.
- ✓ Good for people who don't have the outdoor space or ability to do backyard composting.

Cons:

- You do not get the finished product for use in your yard or garden.
- Organic materials are collected separately from yard waste due to regulations about invasive species.
- Requires bagging either in paper or certified compostable plastic bags.

Indoor collection containers

For either method of composting, you will need to collect your organics in some kind of a container inside. Covers on collection containers can be more problematic than helpful because bacteria decomposing your food waste without air create the stinky smells you might associate with garbage. If you do want to use a bin with a cover, it should have vents or a carbon filter to allow air flow. If you are having a problem with odor or flies, you can keep your collected organics in the fridge or freezer until it's time to take it to your backyard pile or organics cart.



Backyard composting basics

What to compost (and what to leave out)

Many of us understand what we should compost, but we sometimes get confusing information about what we should NOT compost. Composting is a microbial process and microbes – also called microorganisms – will not decompose synthetic products such as plastics or glass. Home composting systems typically don't reach high enough temperatures to break down meat, dairy, grease and oil. These materials can also attract critters to your compost bin and cause foul odors. Feces from pets may carry pathogens that could cause health problems. Large pieces of wood do not compost quickly, so wood should be chipped or shredded and used minimally. Organic materials that can be added to enhance the nutritive value of compost include blood and bone meal, cotton seed meal and aquatic plants.



Compost:		DO NOT compost:	
✓	• Yard waste: plant trimmings, leaves, weeds without seeds, pine needles	✗	• Meat and dairy: meat pieces, dairy products, bones, fish scraps, raw eggs
✓	• Kitchen waste: fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, paper tea bags, egg shells	✗	• Fats: cooking oil, drippings and grease
✓	• Materials that add nutritive value: blood and bone meal, cotton seed meal, aquatic plants	✗	• Synthetics: motor oil, glass, plastic, styrofoam, polyester
✓	• Small amounts of: sawdust, wood chips, small sticks	✗	• Feces: from dogs, cats, and humans
✓	• Wood ashes: add in small amounts. Ashes act as lime source and affect the pH of your compost.	✗	• Weeds: with seeds
		✗	• Large pieces of wood

What about cuttings treated with herbicides?

Although studies have shown that low levels of herbicides are detectable even in well-decomposed yard trimmings, these levels are less than 1 percent of the level found in trimmings prior to composting and are not considered a risk for using in the garden. Ideally, grass clippings from lawns treated with herbicides should be left on the lawn to decompose, which allows the herbicides to degrade.



Benefits of using compost

As a soil amendment:

Compost loosens and aerates soil and improves water and nutrient retention. Adding 1 to 2 inches of compost to the top 6 to 8 inches of your garden improves soil structure over time, making the soil easier to work while creating a better environment for plant growth. Compost is beneficial to a variety of soil types. It improves drainage and aeration in heavy clay soils and increases the moisture-holding capacity of sandy soils.

Adding compost to your soil will attract beneficial organisms such as earthworms and microorganisms that break down organic matter naturally. Compost also improves seeding, plant emergence, and water infiltration by reducing the potential for soil crusting.

As a mulch:

Adding 6 to 8 inches of compost to garden beds suppresses weeds by blocking light to the soil surface. The mulch will decompose and add organic matter to the soil. Compost also reduces the potential for erosion by protecting the soil surface from wind and hard rain.

Using compost as mulch reduces moisture loss. Top-dress your lawn with compost to conserve moisture and add organic matter. Use compost in window boxes and container gardens where rapid moisture loss is an issue. Compost may also keep soils cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.

Steps to backyard composting

✓ Assemble your compost bin

Many lawn and garden stores also sell compost bins that require minimal assembly. You can also search for options online to make a compost bin yourself with a few materials and tools. A good compost bin allows for air flow and moisture to enter the pile while also preventing pests from accessing your compost material.



✓ Find a place for your compost bin

Choose a place in your yard where your bin is easily accessible year-round so you can continue composting in the winter. Some people incorporate their bin into the design of their landscape and plant their garden right around the bin!

Your compost will break down in the sun or shade. The heat in your compost pile mostly comes from the organisms living in the pile.

Good drainage and accessibility is important for your compost bin. You should have enough room around the bin to allow you to turn the compost and a water source nearby in case you need to add moisture.

Each city has its own ordinances about composting. Check with your city recycling coordinator for details concerning your local laws.

✓ Layer your materials

Start your pile with a 6-inch layer of brown materials, such as twigs and/or dry leaves. This will help elevate your pile and allow air to circulate at the base of the pile. Then alternate layers of brown materials and green materials. Add a few layers of garden soil or finished compost, which contain the microorganisms required to speed up decomposition. Add a little water to dampen the pile, and you are on your way!

✓ Maintain your compost pile

As your compost pile begins the decomposition process, the temperature of the pile will begin to rise, especially in the center. A well-built pile may reach temperatures of 130° F to 160° F in just a few days. The pile will begin to cool in four to five days, and a depression may appear in the middle of the pile. At this point, it is time to turn the pile.

Use a garden fork and turn the outside of the pile inward. Steam may rise from the pile – this is a sign that the decomposition process is working! If the pile is dry, add a small amount of water. If it is too wet, add some dry materials such as dry leaves or paper towels. Cover the pile with a layer of brown materials, soil, or compost (to ensure any food scraps are buried), and it will start to re-heat.

Turning your pile on a regular basis will speed up the decomposition process. Turn your pile weekly or monthly to get finished compost sooner.



✓ Identify when your compost is finished

Under warm conditions, a well-tended compost pile will be finished and ready for use in about two to four months. Left untended, a bin may take a year to decompose. A finished compost pile is about half its original size, is loose, dark and crumbly, and smells good – like fresh soil. Most of the materials that went into the compost pile should not be identifiable. Another sign that your pile is fully composted and ready for use is when it no longer heats up.

The recipe for a successful compost pile



There are four basic ingredients for good compost: carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and moisture.

Carbon and nitrogen: In the composting process, microorganisms use carbon for energy and nitrogen to make proteins. For home composting, this translates to a proportion of three parts carbon (brown materials) to one part nitrogen (green materials). Given this “diet,” microorganisms can make short work of your materials.

Browns (carbon)

Dried grasses
Dry leaves
Straw
Sawdust
Twigs

3 to 1

Greens (nitrogen)

Coffee grounds
Fruit and vegetable peelings
Grass clippings
Green leaves
Plant trimmings

Oxygen and moisture are important for the health and activity of the microorganisms. An active compost pile – one in which microorganisms are actively converting organic materials to compost – has good air circulation and the moisture consistency of a wrung-out sponge. If a pile is compacted or too wet or too dry, microorganisms will cease their work and the pile will become passive.

Air circulation can be accomplished though turning your pile with a garden fork. Do not allow the pile to become soggy as this causes anaerobic conditions (meaning no air) and usually produces a foul smell. A pile can become too wet due to excess water from rain or from too much green material. This can be corrected by adding carbon (brown) material and by turning the pile to increase the oxygen level.

Tips for home composting

- Keep your compost pile at the right moisture level. If your compost pile has a bad odor, it lacks air circulation or it may be too wet. Try turning the pile and/or adding dry material.
- If your compost pile is not heating up, it may need more nitrogen or “green” material. Add more fruit/vegetable scraps or grass clippings and stir the pile
- Bury kitchen scraps at least 8 Inches deep in the compost to discourage critters.
- You can keep adding to your compost pile as it is composting; however, you want to start a second pile if you have enough materials.
- The smaller the pieces of compost material, the faster the pile will decompose.

Vermicomposting: composting with worms

A third option for composting food waste is called vermicomposting, which involves using worms to decompose food scraps. A worm composting bin is kept indoors to protect the worms from freezing in the winter and overheating in the summer.

You can make your own bin or purchase one. You’ll need shredded paper to create bedding material. Plan to feed the worms your kitchen scraps once a week.

Vermicomposting produces worm castings and worm “tea,” both of which are nutrient-rich soil amendments.

Find a detailed tutorial at [epa.gov/recycle/how-create-and-maintain-indoor-worm-composting-bin](https://www.epa.gov/recycle/how-create-and-maintain-indoor-worm-composting-bin).



Organics recycling

Hennepin County requires cities to make organics recycling service available to all households with curbside recycling service. The ordinance offers flexibility in how cities meet the requirement, so they can develop an approach based on the needs of their community. For example, cities may contract for citywide service or require haulers to provide the service. Smaller cities (with a population of 10,000 or less) can choose to provide an organics recycling drop-off option instead of making curbside organics recycling service available.

Because organics recycling service and drop-offs vary by city, it's best to check with your city or waste hauler for details. More information about organics recycling requirements and options is available at hennepin.us/organics.



Tips for collecting organics at home



Use a kitchen pail lined with a compostable bag. Consider a vented container that allows moisture to evaporate, which will reduce odors and help your compostable bags last longer.



If you have issues with smells or flies, keep "wet" organics in the refrigerator or freezer. You can also create a fruit fly trap using vinegar and a few drops of dish soap.



Keep non-compostable materials out. Receiving organics free of contamination allows local composters to produce clean, nutrient-rich compost that people want to purchase and use. If you aren't sure if an item is compostable, put it in the trash.



Focus on collecting food. Food scraps are the most common material in the trash and the most nutrient-rich material in the composting process.

Accepted for organics recycling

All food

- Fruits and vegetables
- Meat, fish and bones
- Dairy products
- Eggs and egg shells
- Pasta, beans and rice
- Bread and cereal
- Nuts and shells



Food-soiled paper

- Pizza boxes from delivery (remove any sauce cups or other plastic items)
- Napkins and paper towels (do not include napkins with metallic print or foil)
- Paper egg cartons



Other compostable household items

- Coffee grounds and filters
- Hair and nail clippings
- Cotton balls and swabs with paper stems (do not include if they were used for makeup or chemical cleaners)
- Houseplants and flowers (do not include soil)
- Wooden items such as chopsticks, popsicle sticks and toothpicks



Certified compostable products

- Compostable paper and plastic cups, plates, bowls, utensils and containers

Look for the BPI logo or the term "compostable" on certified products.



Not accepted

- Animal and pet waste, litter, or bedding
- Bandages
- Cleaning or baby wipes
- Diapers
- Dryer lint and dryer sheets
- Fast food wrappers and deli paper
- Frozen food boxes
- Grease or oil
- Gum
- Menstrual products
- Microwave popcorn bags
- Plastic-lined paper products, which includes many take-out boxes, plates, paper cups
- Products labeled "biodegradable" with no additional certification
- Recyclable items (cartons, glass, metal, paper, plastic)
- Styrofoam™
- Yard waste

Certified compostable products



Paper and plastic plates, bowls, cups, containers, and utensils must be certified compostable to be accepted. Look for the BPI logo or the term "compostable"

on certified products. Visit [bpiworld.org](https://www.bpiworld.org) to check if a product has current certification.

If an item is not certified compostable, it is not accepted for organics recycling and should go in the trash. Examples of items that must be certified compostable include: coffee cups, utensils, to-go containers, plastic cups, compost bin liners, and more.



Donating and selling reusable goods



Keep your durable goods out of the trash! Whether you're moving, redecorating, or just have something you no longer love tucked away in a closet, donating and selling is a great way to give your items a second life.

Getting rid of your stuff

It may be helpful to designate a spot to put everything you'll sell or donate. Some people keep a box or a bag handy and, when it fills up, they take it to a reuse store. Options for getting rid of your useable goods include:

Drop off

Drop off your goods at local reuse retailers like Arc's Value Village, Goodwill, Salvation Army, or local thrift store. Make sure your items are clean and usable, and double check that the item is accepted by the store before you make the trip (especially for large items). Many stores offer a coupon or tax receipt for donating your items. Read our Choose to Reuse article on organizing your donations for more tips: hennepin.us/choose-to-reuse/tips/organize-your-donations

Sell

Get some money back for your goods by selling your stuff at consignment shops or holding a garage sale. Many cities and neighborhoods also host larger garage sales with multiple sellers. Thrifty Minnesota (thriftyminnesota.com) posts yearly lists of garage sales by city, or watch your usual neighborhood news sources.

Post online

List your items on sites like Craigslist, Facebook Buy Nothing or sale groups, Nextdoor, and Twin Cities Freecycle. Sites like these may be useful for getting rid of larger items that would be a hassle to move or things you don't need to get rid of immediately. You can work out a pickup arrangement with potential buyers or just let more people know about what you have for sale or for free.

Swap

Swap events, where you trade usable items you no longer want, have become increasingly popular for things like clothing, garden tools and equipment, and outdoor gear. Search online for clothing, tool, and gear swaps in your area, or check out a guide on how to host a swap of your own: doitgreen.org/wp-content/uploads/swap_guide_do_it_green.pdf

Choose to Reuse

Visit Hennepin County's Choose to Reuse website at hennepin.us/choosetoreuse to find retailers and services nearby to donate and sell your stuff. The website also includes articles on reuse topics and green event listings.

Properly dispose of household hazardous wastes



Some waste should never be put in your trash or recycling. Batteries, drain cleaner and other cleaners, electronics, fluorescent bulbs, hair spray, medicines, mercury thermometers, pesticides and herbicides, and unused nail polish and nail polish remover are common items people may not realize should be taken to a drop-off facility. These items may contain hazardous metals or chemicals that require careful disposal.

Hennepin County drop-off facilities

Many items are accepted at Hennepin County drop-off facilities, including:

- Appliances (for a fee)
- Automotive fluids, fuels, oil and lead-acid batteries
- Electronics (some fees apply)
- Household, lawn and garden products, including batteries, cleaning products, fluorescent light bulbs, paints and stains, pesticides, and thermostats and thermometers that contain mercury
- Personal care products including hair spray, nail polish remover, and perfume

Learn more about hazardous waste and other non-hazardous bulky items that are accepted at Hennepin County drop-offs at hennepin.us/drop-offs.

Additional disposal options

These items have additional disposal options.

Batteries

Batteries should be recycled. Some batteries contain toxic metals that can pose a threat to human health and the environment. Use rechargeable batteries to reduce the number you use. To safely store batteries for recycling and prevent fires, place clear tape on both the positive (+) and negative (-) terminals, and place them in a clear plastic bag. Check with your local electronics or hardware store for drop off options or bring to a Hennepin County drop-off facility.

Electronics

If your electronics work, sell them or give them away. If they are broken, bring them to a Hennepin County Fix-It Clinic for help with troubleshooting and repair. If they no longer function and are not repairable, look for manufacturers and retailers with recycling take-back programs or take to a Hennepin County drop-off facility. See the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide for more details. Before disposing of your items, make sure you remove all personal data and files.

Medicines

Unwanted or unused medicines should be brought to a Hennepin County medicine drop box for safe and proper disposal. All types of medicines from households, including prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, supplements, and pet medicines, are accepted. Find more information and a map of locations at hennepin.us/medicine.

Sharps

Dispose of sharps safely to prevent injury and disease transmission from needle-sticks. Check with your healthcare provider to see if they accept sharps for disposal, destroy them at home with a needle destruction device, take to a Hennepin County drop-off facility in Brooklyn Park or Bloomington, or use a mail-in program. Store your needles and sharps in a rigid, puncture-resistant, plastic container with a screw-on lid, such as an empty laundry detergent bottle. You can also purchase a sharps disposable container from a pharmacy. Due to the risk of breakage, do NOT use a glass container. Visit the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide and search for Needles and Sharps for more information.

Additional information

Find other disposal options for household hazardous waste at hennepin.us/greendisposalguide or call 612-348-3777.

Get tips for reducing harmful chemicals in your home at hennepin.us/residents/recycling-hazardous-waste/reduce-household-hazardous-waste.

Reducing waste



After properly disposing of all the waste you currently create, you can begin to look at where you can prevent waste in the first place. Remember that zero waste is not just about getting items out of the trash but reducing what goes into your recycling and organics recycling as well. Not creating waste in the first place is always better than recycling it!

If you haven't done so already, note which materials you still have in abundance. This could be a good time to conduct another informal waste audit by going through your waste streams again. Use the worksheets at the end of this guide to help lay out your goals and monitor your progress.

Setting waste-reduction goals

Once you've evaluated your waste, ask yourself the following questions to choose your waste-reduction goals:

- What is left in my trash? What do I have the most of in my recycling and organics?
- What can I change about my waste?
- Are there certain areas of the house that will be easier than others to tackle first?
- What are my reasons for trying to reduce waste? Thinking about what matters the most to you – health, cost, environment, decluttering, etc. – can help with prioritizing your actions.

Rethinking what you bring into your home

Transitioning to a lower waste lifestyle involves being more intentional about what you buy or otherwise accumulate. It can be useful to think about materials before they become waste. In other words, think about what you are bringing into your home rather than what is going out.

Consider the following frameworks when you are considering getting new things:

Want versus need

Ask yourself:

- Do I need to buy this?
- Can something else be used for the same purpose?
- Does it add value to my life?
- Am I going to still want it one month from now?

Source

Consider:

- Can I rent or borrow this item?
- Can I buy it secondhand?
- Can I purchase it locally or find it package-free?

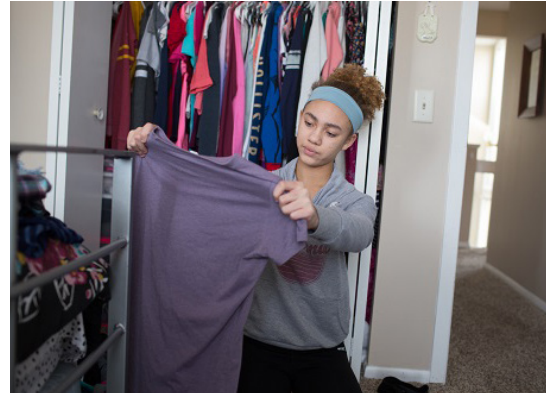
Material

Think about:

- What is this item made of?
- Can I fix it if it breaks? Are replacement parts available?
- Does it have resale value if I no longer want it?
- Where does it go when it is broken or used up? Can I recycle or compost it?

Asking yourself these questions before you acquire a new thing helps you slow down to consider your impact and ensures you are being thoughtful about the resources you consume.

The rest of the guide includes a breakdown of how to reduce waste from different categories of your life, including with food, packaging, and plastics, your wardrobe and personal care routines, as well as when it comes to kids, pets, traveling, home management, cleaning, remodeling, and hosting gatherings.



Food



One of the most avoidable sources of waste in our trash is food. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take to reduce wasted food.

Eat the food you buy



Start reducing food waste by eating the food you buy. Keep track of the freshness of your ingredients, and check the cupboards and refrigerator before buying more. Look up recipes based on whatever you need to use up first.

It is helpful to create a designated spot for “eat first” foods in your refrigerator or pantry to help other family members notice, too. And don’t forget to eat or freeze leftovers or items about to spoil.

Involve your kids in making meals. This can involve a little more work (and mess), but generally kids are more likely

to eat something they have helped create. This helps start your kids off on the right foot by teaching them to cook, explore, and enjoy more foods.

Exposing kids to a variety of foods is important, but this doesn’t have to result in a lot of waste. Serve small portions to encourage exploration but avoid too much waste.

Encourage your family to bring home any food in their lunches they didn’t eat to have later. Serve leftover food as snacks, incorporate into new meals, or send it again the next day for lunch. For ideas on what to pack and containers to pack it in, visit a blog such as 100 Days of Real Food at 100daysofrealfood.com/school-lunches.

“When my son gets home from school and asks for a snack, we first check his lunch and have him eat whatever he skipped before we offer him more food. If fruit or veggies get brown or mushy from sitting in his lunch all day, we set them aside for smoothies, stir-fries, or roasted veggies. If my son isn’t hungry, we often include what’s left in his lunch on his plate at dinner. This ensures he eats healthy and we prevent wasted food.” – mom from St. Louis Park

Practice meal planning



Meal planning involves preparing for meals and snacks in advance. There are many different approaches you can take to meal planning, and it's important to find what works for your household.

Some people like to plan out every meal for each day of the week or month, while others like to create general ideas and leave flexibility for what they eat each day. Here are some examples of meal-planning approaches you could try:

- Schedule-based: Look ahead in your schedule and plan easy or quick meals for busy days.
- Theme-based: Set daily themes that give you a starting point, such as pizza night, crockpot meals, soup, pasta, or tacos.
- Ingredient-based: Work backward from the staples you keep on hand and find recipes that use them in different ways.

Other ideas for taking the guesswork out of meal planning are to repeat recipes you already know, plan days to eat up leftovers, and create a "household cookbook" of meals you know are tried and true.

Putting meals together in batches is a good way to make life and meal prep simpler. You can create individual or family sized portions of fresh or frozen foods, often for the week ahead.

When you plan meals, you can go to the grocery store with a list to buy exactly what you need and no more. Make your shopping list based on how many meals you'll eat at home. Then look in the refrigerator and cupboards first to avoid buying food you already have.

Make a list each week of what needs to be used up and plan upcoming meals around that. Remember that casseroles, stir-fries, frittatas, soups, and smoothies are great ways to use leftovers. Search for websites that provide suggestions for using leftover ingredients. Many apps and websites exist to help you get started (such as [savethefood.com/articles/10-easy-tips-for-meal-planning](https://www.savethefood.com/articles/10-easy-tips-for-meal-planning))

The U.S. EPA has a food waste reduction toolkit with printable worksheets available at [epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-too-good-waste-implementation-guide-and-toolkit](https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-too-good-waste-implementation-guide-and-toolkit). The toolkit contains the following worksheets to help you buy, store and prep foods:

- Smart Shopping: Shop with Meals in Mind
- Smart Prep: Prep Now, Eat Later
- Smart Storage: Fruits and Vegetables Storage Tips

Understand food labels

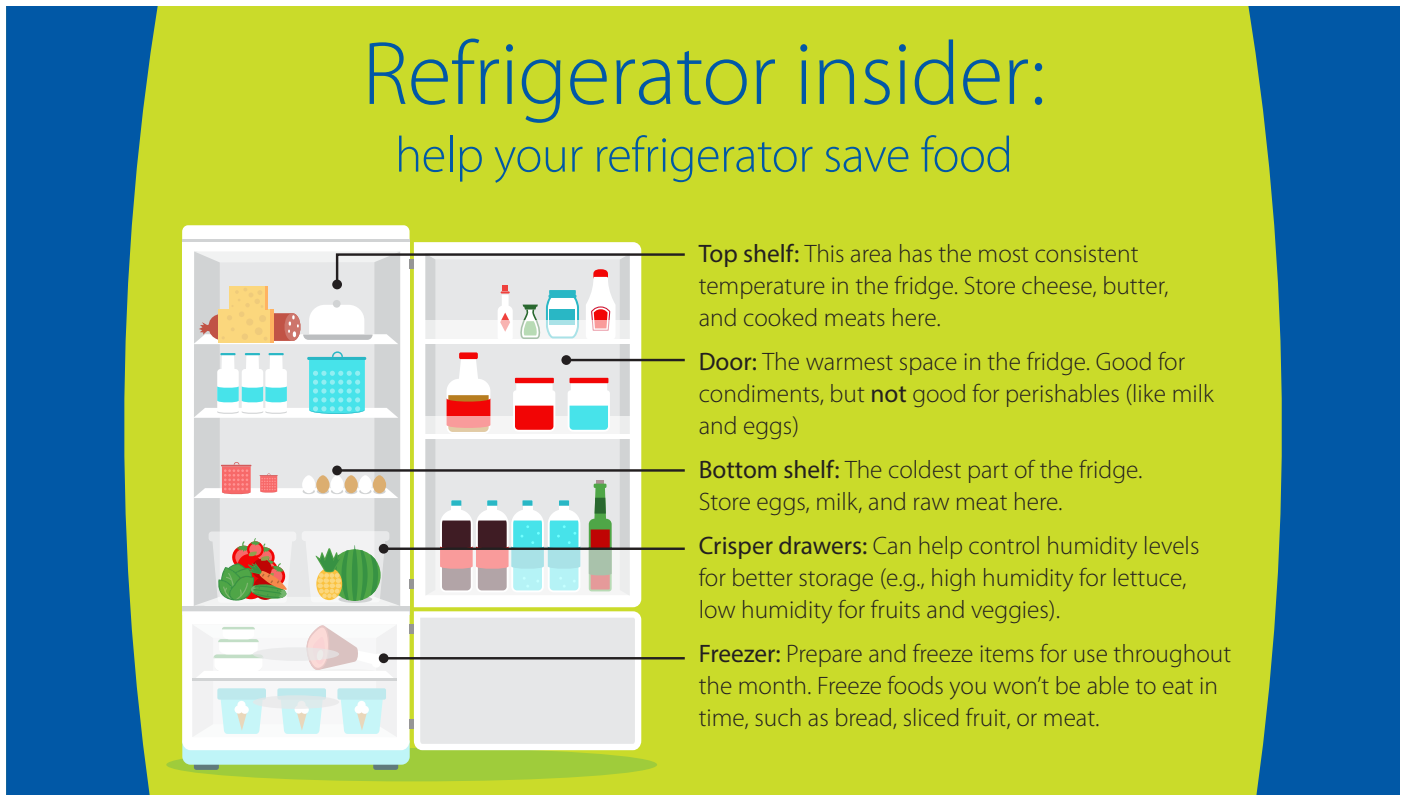
There is no universally accepted system for dating food in the United States. The only federally regulated food labeling is on baby formula to ensure the nutrient levels listed on the packaging are accurate until the expiration date. The dates on food labels are generally not expiration dates but merely suggestions as to when the product is at its freshest.

Labels like "use by" and "best if used by" describe product quality, not safety. Use your sense of smell, sight and judgment to determine when food has gone bad. Don't use foods that have developed an off odor, flavor or appearance.



Properly store your food

Did you know that where you put food in your refrigerator can contribute to how long it lasts? Make sure you follow some basic guidelines explained in the graphic below about where to store foods based on the average temperatures in your fridge.



Other food storage tips:

- Keep the fridge temperature at 40 degrees or colder. Bacteria do not like the cold.
- Store fruits and vegetables separately from each other as fruits emit natural gases that accelerate ripening and can make other nearby produce spoil faster.
- Wait to wash berries until you want to eat them to prevent mold.
- Freeze food such as bread, sliced fruit, or meat that you know you won't be able to eat in time.
- Don't keep perishable food, such as bread or wine, on top of the fridge. The fridge gives off heat that can make foods spoil faster.
- Prepare and cook perishable items then freeze them for use throughout the month. For example, cook and freeze chicken breasts or taco meat.

To refrigerate, or not to refrigerate?

Yes

Apples, berries, cherries, grapes, kiwi, lemons, oranges
Most vegetables
Fresh herbs, wrapped in a damp towel or in a container

Yes, but...leave out at room temperature until ripe and then refrigerate:

Melons, nectarines, apricots, peaches, plums, avocados, pears, tomatoes

Not necessary – these store well outside of the refrigerator, in a cool, dry place (unless cut up):

Bananas, mangos, papayas, and pineapples
Potatoes, onions (keep in a dark place)
Winter squash

To find more information about proper storage to make your food last its longest, check out [savethefood.com/food-storage](https://www.savethefood.com/food-storage).

Start a garden and eat local

Growing your own produce is a great way to reduce packaging and ensure that your fruits and veggies are eaten at peak freshness. If you don't have a yard or an area big enough for a garden, you can get a plot at a community garden. Ask your neighbors or explore your neighborhood resources to find a garden near you.

You can also grow quite a few herbs and small vegetables in pots. Growing your own herbs can help you prevent waste by allowing you to only pick the amount you need per time.

Another way to reduce the impact of your meals is to eat local foods that are in season. This reduces the carbon emissions generated by transporting foods across the country or globe. Here are some examples of cookbooks to help get you started:

- Eating Local by Sur La Table
- Edible: A Celebration of Local Foods by Tracey Ryder and Carole Topalian
- Mark Bittman's Kitchen Express – 404 inspired seasonal dishes you can make in 20 minutes or less by Mark Bittman
- The Birchwood Cafe Cookbook by Tracy Singleton
- The Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook by Tim King
- The Perennial Kitchen by Beth Dooley



Packaging



You can reduce packaging in different areas of your life by targeting the way you buy your groceries and other consumable items such as cleaning products or detergents.

Avoid packaging at the grocery store

Avoid excess packaging of your food by ditching single-serve portions for snacks and meals and instead buying the big box or bag and re-packing your food into your own reusable containers. You will find this saves you money, too!

One example: instead of buying single-serve baby carrots for lunches, buy a large bag of carrots, slice into sticks and pack in containers. Remember to compost the peels and reuse the produce bag or add it to your plastic film recycling. You can also reduce waste further by buying unbagged carrots, using a reusable produce bag, and leaving the skins on rather than peeling them.

Buy in bulk



Reduce food packaging even more by shopping in the bulk section of the grocery store and using your own produce bags and containers at farmers markets, co-ops or natural food stores (Check out the Minnesota Grown Directory at minnesotagrown.com for a farmers

market listing). Ask your grocery store before using your own containers if they have a bulk bin section as some check-out aisles cannot remove the container weight, or "tare" weight, from your purchase.

If you find that your store cannot weigh outside bags or containers, you can always use a lightweight reusable bag instead of plastic produce bags, and use any reusable bag or container when items are sold by count instead of by weight. Check the price signs to find out how you'll pay. Examples by count: "\$0.79 each," or "2 for \$4"

Make your own

See recipes starting on page 60 to learn how to make the following waste-reducing products:

- Pizza dough (eliminate frozen pizza boxes or cardboard takeout boxes)
- Yogurt (reduce plastic packaging)
- Mustard (reduce or eliminate plastic squeeze bottles)
- Stovetop popcorn (eliminate potentially harmful and non-recyclable microwave popcorn bags)
- Infused water and herbal teas (reduce or eliminate plastic bottles or tea bags and paper or plastic packaging)
- Kitchen cleaners (reduce or eliminate hazardous chemicals and plastic packaging)

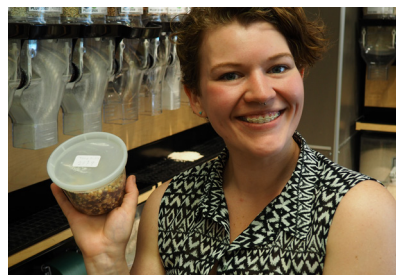
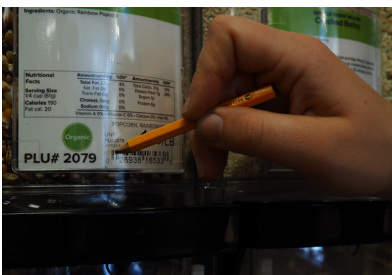
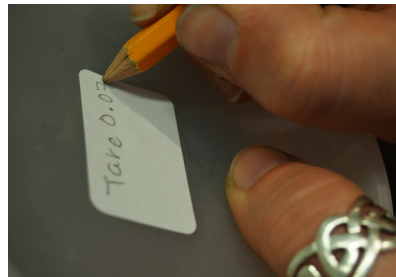
“Bulk packaged” vs. “bulk loose”

Large wholesale club stores like Costco and Sam’s Club offer foods in bulk quantities, but this doesn’t always mean you are preventing waste. Many items are still individually packaged within a larger box or bag. Ask yourself if the packaging is reducing waste, and remember to only buy an amount of food your family can consume before it spoils. It can be tempting to buy a large amount of produce at a good price, but if it goes bad, you negate the benefits both to you and to the environment. Regular grocery stores and co-ops have “loose” bulk goods, where you usually scoop or pour the product directly into your own container or a provided bag. These options can be very helpful when trying to reduce waste because you can avoid much of the packaging.

How to buy in bulk

You may be intimidated by the long lines of bins filled with nuts, grains and flours at your store, but buying in bulk is usually an easy and economical way to buy your food and avoid waste at the same time.

1. Choose the item you want to purchase.
2. If you can use your own container, find the tare weight, or weight of the container, by weighing your empty container and writing down its weight. The grocery store can then subtract the weight of the container when charging for your food or product.
3. Fill up your container or bag with the food or product.
4. Make sure to write down the product number, listed as PLU, from the bulk container onto your individual container.



Packaging of on-the-go foods

A lot of pre-packaged or convenience food comes in non-recyclable and non-compostable wrapping. To reduce waste and save money, pack your own snacks and lunches.

Remember that reusable lunch bags, utensils, and napkins are not just for the kids, but should be used by all family members. Skip the plastic bags and use reusable containers instead. Choose durable bottles for drinks and fill them with tap water or other beverages.

Instead of buying new, you may be able to reuse packaging from foods that you bought or storage containers you already have. If you need an extra set of dishware or utensils, check your local thrift store for options.



Pictured: Reusable sandwich and snack bags and reusable sealing bowls.

Plastics



Many people who are working to reduce their waste realize they need to take a specific look at the amount of plastic they use in their lives. Plastic is versatile, light, and cheap to produce, but it also causes a lot of harm to the environment and to people's health.

From a waste perspective, using plastic is not ideal because many kinds are not recyclable, and, even if they are, the products can only be recycled one or two times before they become trash. Durable items made of plastic are also less likely to be able to be repaired when they break.

Because it is so common, it can be hard to avoid plastic, but there are simple things you can do to cut out single-use plastic in your life.

Remember your reusable bags

Remember to pack everything in reusable grocery bags rather than single-use plastic bags. If you need an extra reminder, you can get a window cling to put on your car window, door, or whatever location is closest to where you store your bags. Order window clings and other educational resources at environmentalresources.hennepin.us/items

Since grocery delivery doesn't allow you to use your reusable bags, consider using it less frequently or setting it as a future goal if life circumstances make it hard for you to do your own shopping.



"One of the simplest things many people can do, but one of the hardest habits to start, is to bring your own bag. Many of us function on autopilot, and this includes going to the grocery store. I would try my best to leave my bags where I could find them before I went to the store – on the counter, on the doorknob, in my trunk, and I would almost always walk right past them! I started putting my reusable bags in the front seat of my car with me so I would have no excuse to forget them. Now after doing this for about 6 months, I've been able to remember my bags much better, but it takes a long time to start any new habit despite best intentions!"

- student

Replace disposables with reusables

To reduce waste, eliminate most of the disposable products you use. These products may feel convenient, but don't forget the time and money that goes into constantly replacing and disposing of them! Think about which of these common products you use and how they could be replaced.

- **Paper coffee cups:** Paper coffee cups usually have a plastic coating that makes them unacceptable for both recycling and organics recycling. Although the plastic coating provides insulation to keep your drink hot, it ends up making the paper coffee cup not recyclable. The #6 plastic lid isn't recyclable either because it's a low-value plastic. Remember to bring a reusable coffee mug when you get coffee to-go (some places even give you a discount!).
- **Paper towels and synthetic sponges:** Trade in single-use paper towels and sponges for an old-fashioned cloth rag and a scrubber brush or scraper. Not only are these more durable, they can be washed and reused over and over again.
- **Plastic baggies:** Use reusable containers or cloth snack bags instead. Reusable containers come in a variety of materials to suit your needs, including cloth, glass, metal, and silicone. Rigid containers are a great option to help protect your items from being crushed when taken on the go. Cloth snack bags are similar to plastic bags and help save space in your lunch bag.
- **Plastic grocery bags:** Keep a few reusable bags near the door, in your car, or in your purse or backpack so you always have some even if you make an unplanned stop. This will help you avoid accumulating plastic bags that you have to store or take to a drop-off for plastic film recycling.
- **Plastic produce and bulk food bags:** These can be avoided as well! If your grocery store accepts tare weights, you can use any container for your produce and bulk goods. Just remember to write down the weight before using them. If your store does not have the capability to separate these weights, use your own bag on items sold by count (for example: if limes are \$.50 each). You can also use a lightweight bag for other purchases sold by weight if you don't mind paying a little bit extra to avoid waste.
- **Plastic wrap:** Use reusable containers with lids for storing foods, place a plate over a bowl in the refrigerator or try an option like beeswax cloth to wrap your food or put over the top of your containers. A few common brands are Bee's Wrap and Abeego. Or you can try making your own (search the web for a tutorial).
- **Single use coffee pods:** Single-serve coffee makers such as Keurigs create a lot of waste with no recycling option. You can pull apart the little cup and compost the grounds, but no area recyclers accept the plastic or foil lid because they are too small to be recycled. If you already have a machine, try reusable pods, which are now widely available in stores and online.
- **Dryer sheets:** Swap out dryer sheets for reusable dryer balls. You can buy some or make your own (search online for a variety of types). You can also avoid static by hanging your clothes to dry. If you prefer your clothing to have a scent, use a homemade linen spray or keep a sachet of flowers, herbs, or cedar in your dresser. You can also use pieces of cloth soaked in vinegar and essential oil as a dryer sheet replacement. They can be stored in a glass jar to soak before and after the load of laundry is done drying. Just run them with a load and then put them back in the jar to be ready for the next use.



Personal care routine



When it comes to personal care, there are many small changes you can make that help reduce the amount of “stuff” you have to toss.

Simplify products

Don't let your personal care products take over your counter or cupboards! Some products can serve more than one purpose, and many are unnecessary. Consider cutting back on the number of products you use for your skin, face and hair to save time, money and waste.

If you can, buy soaps or shampoos in bar form or in refillable containers. Many co-ops have bulk sections where you can bring your empty, reusable containers to refill. You can also avoid excess packaging of your toiletries if you learn how to make your own products, including scrubs, moisturizers, and even deodorant.

Reduce waste with medicines



Medications can be a source of trash that is hard to avoid, but there are some reduction options. Look for painkillers or other common over-the-counter medicines that come in recyclable bottles rather than individually packaged pills. Be sure to purchase medicines in quantities you can use before they

expire, and if you do need to throw medicines away, be sure to do it properly by bringing them to a medicine drop box. Find locations and details on using the boxes at hennepin.us/medicine.

When you get sick, use simple home remedies that help alleviate cold symptoms and produce little to no extra waste:

- Gargle with warm salt water or drink warm tea with honey for a sore throat.
- Use a warm washcloth to sooth painful sinuses.
- Breathe warm humid air (from a shower, pot of hot water or humidifier) or prop up your pillow at night to relieve congestion.
- Drink or consume plenty of liquids. Good old chicken soup can help!

Make your own

See recipes starting on page 60 for these bathroom items:

- Shaving cream
- Moisturizer
- Hair care alternatives
- Green cleaners

Oral hygiene



Dentists recommend a new toothbrush every three months, which means the number

of toothbrushes your family tosses out can add up. Check out TerraCycle (terracycle.com/en-US/brigades/colgate) for recycling options for toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes, and plastic floss packaging. Check to see if any stores near you or anyone you know is already collecting these materials for recycling.

You can also find toothbrushes that are made from recycled or compostable materials. One option is Preserve toothbrushes, which are made from recycled yogurt cups and can be recycled through their mail-in program. Another option is compostable toothbrushes made of wood or bamboo with plastic bristles. Pull out the bristles and compost the handle when you are finished with it. Make sure to only compost wood, bamboo, or certified compostable plastics.

You can make toothpaste at home or buy toothpaste powder or tablets in bulk or recyclable containers. When making your own, buy ingredients in bulk using your own containers and test a small amount first to see if you like it to avoid creating more waste.

Makeup

Reduce what you use

Packaging for cosmetics is often not recyclable because it is either too small for the sorting facilities to capture or composed of more than one material type. Plus cosmetics do expire, so having an extensive selection of makeup inevitably leads to waste. Reduce your cosmetic waste by simplifying what you use. For example, limit what you have on hand to one or two shades of products like eye liner, lipstick, or nail polish.

Make your own or use less-waste options

Making your own cosmetics eliminates packaging waste and reduces the number of ingredients for those with sensitivities. There are many DIY recipes online for lip stains and balms, mascara, blush, and eyeliner. If DIY isn't your thing, buy products in reusable, recyclable or compostable packaging, including metal, cardboard and glass containers. Many brands offer refills for items like eyeshadow, foundation, and lipstick, which reduce waste and cost less. Additionally, some companies, including Aveda, Kiehl's, Lush, MAC Cosmetics and Origins, have packaging take-back programs.

Makeup removal



Skip the packaged facial wipes and cotton pads and use washable cloths or a natural sponge instead. Try using olive or coconut oil to aid in removal.

Razors and shaving cream



Instead of purchasing fully disposable razors, use one where only the head or the blade is replaceable. These blades tend to last much longer than cheaper blades. Take an additional step by learning how to use a safety razor or straight edge blade.

There are also ways you can keep your blades sharper for longer – extending their lifespan. Sharpen, or strop, your blades by following these steps:

- Start with a clean and dry razor and an old pair of jeans
- Place your jeans on a flat surface. Run your razor along your jeans (with the direction of the blades and not against the blades, you don't want to cut into the pants)
- Do this approximately 20 times with quick, short strokes using light pressure

Instead of shaving cream from an aerosol can, try using an olive-oil-based soap or a specific shaving bar soap with a brush. You can also make your own shaving cream from bulk bin products (see the recipes section).

Feminine products



Swap out disposable pads and tampons with products such as menstrual cups or sponges, reusable pads, and/or period underwear. Reusable products are a safe alternative as long as you take care to clean the product as directed. These options are more expensive than disposables up front, but save significant money over time as you reuse them.

Tissues and wipes



Swap out paper tissues and wipes for cloth handkerchiefs and washcloths for everyday use. Keep a clean handkerchief or washcloth with you, or keep a stash of small cloth wipes stocked in a central spot for the whole family to use.

With both tissues and handkerchiefs, make sure to wash your hands after blowing your nose. If you have concerns about spreading germs while someone has the flu or another virus, you can use tissues for the short term and go back to reusables once the illness has passed.

Toilet paper



While toilet paper is generally not something you can avoid using, there are more sustainable options. Look for recycled content paper, bamboo toilet paper, and brands that use little or no plastic packaging. Some families pursuing zero waste install a bidet seat or sprayer to cut down on their toilet paper usage.

Paper bathroom cups

If you use paper or disposable plastic cups, switch them out for reusable ones. Each family member can have a designated color or design. This saves money, and the only extra work is washing a cup or sticking them in the dishwasher.

Liquid soap

The pump dispenser of disposable liquid soap containers cannot be recycled, so buy soap in a bulk bottle (or in bulk with your own reusable container) and pour into your pump bottle. To reduce even more waste, consider switching from liquid soap in a bottle to a bar of soap, which will also help you avoid paying for one of the main ingredients in liquid soap – water.

Liquid shampoo



Although most shampoo bottles are recyclable (minus the pump dispenser), there are options to reduce or eliminate this waste. Think about using less shampoo per wash or washing your hair less often; your body may be producing more oil to replace what you wash out. If you wash your hair

every day, try cutting back to every other day or less, and give your body time to adjust. If this doesn't work for you, consider using a dry shampoo or a shampoo that comes in bar form. You can also try making your own liquid or dry shampoo – there are many recipes online.

Wardrobes



The clothes and accessories we wear are a huge source of waste from our homes. People buy more clothes than ever before but also wear them for less time. Work on greening your wardrobe by taking good care of the clothing you have and cutting down on the number of new items you bring in.

Buy high-quality clothing



Get the most out of your wardrobe by buying fewer clothes, shoes, and accessories and repairing and repurposing them so they last longer.

View your clothing choices as an investment. Buying high-quality clothes that last a long time and can be repaired will be less expensive and create less waste in the long run. Try to avoid “fast fashion,” where current trends are manifested as inexpensive items that are often made poorly. Fabrics that wear out or tear and seams that unravel after just a few washes are hard to repair. Finding your own personal sense of style may even boost your self-confidence more than wearing whatever is on trend for the moment.

Follow these tips to put together a wardrobe that passes the test of time.

- **Be intentional:** Impulse buying because something is on sale can leave you with cheaply made clothes and accessories that don't fit well or go with anything you have. Avoid filling your closet with things that you barely wear. Honestly ask yourself “Should I buy this? Would I still wear this six months from now?”

- **Look for quality:** Go with brands that have a good reputation for durability or a lifetime warranty (one example is Darn Tough socks). Check the workmanship starting with the seams by gently pulling to see if the thread holds the fabric closely together and doesn't show gaps or pull apart. See that any buttons or fasteners are sewn on securely. Feel the fabric to see how thick it is. For example, a thicker cotton shirt will last longer than a very thin one.
- **Buy versatile items:** It's worth spending more for items that you can wear in a variety of ways. Try to buy garments and accessories that go with others in your closet. Search online for terms such as “minimalist wardrobe” or “wardrobe staples” if you need inspiration for creating multiple looks with fewer pieces.
- **Shop reused:** If you're changing your wardrobe or need to keep costs low, look for clothing and shoes at garage sales, thrift stores, secondhand online dealers, clothing swaps, or from friends. You can often buy high-quality clothes secondhand for what you would spend on a new, less durable piece. This is an especially good option for anyone who is still growing or adults with changing bodies or professions.

Extend the life of your wardrobe



It is often cheaper to repair clothing, shoes, and accessories than to buy a replacement piece. To mend your clothing, search for a video online, take your clothes to a tailor, or attend a monthly Fix-it Clinic where you can be guided through the repair. Remember, items like socks can be darned to extend their use, too.



You should be able to take care of minor shoe repairs with a little bit of glue or other supplies you can find at home, or freshen up dirty or stinky shoes with a bit of cleaning. For fixing leather items or getting your shoes resoled, it is worth a trip to your nearest shoe repair business.

Disposing of clothing

When your clothes are at the end of their life, you can repurpose them (such as making pants with ripped knees into shorts), or you can cut and reuse the fabric for rags. Ask your local reuse retailer that accepts clothing for donation if they will accept unwearable clothing for textile recycling. Some fabrics can be downcycled into fillers or carpet padding.

Kids



From diapers to growth spurts to moving out for college or a career, kids can create a lot of waste at every stage of their life. Luckily, just like in any other aspect of your life, you can also find ways to minimize this waste.

One of the best strategies for low-waste parenting is to focus on applying your low-waste mindset and taking advantage of all the reuse opportunities. When assessing whether an item is needed, consider what you already have and if that can be repurposed for your child's needs. If you need a new item, check with any friends or family who have slightly older children, check online sale and Buy Nothing groups, or visit reuse retailers. From clothing to toys to books to sporting gear, there's a wide array of items you can find used that are still in great shape. All of these options can also be a good way to pass items on to someone else when you are done.

New baby

While manufacturers and marketers want you to believe there is an endless array of items that you need to welcome your new baby, there are few truly essential baby products. Some examples of nonessential items and alternatives include:

- **Baby food processor:** A regular food processor or blender will do the exact same thing as the baby version, and you can use it long after your little one is off baby food.
- **Baby laundry detergent:** Choosing a regular "free and clear" product or making your own will save you money and time because you can throw the baby's laundry in with the rest of the family's dirty clothes. See the recipes section for a laundry detergent recipe.
- **Bottle drying rack:** A regular dish rack works just fine without the additional expense and counter space.
- **Changing table:** if you'd like a changing area, secure a changing pad onto a low dresser, which you can continue to use after your child is out of diapers.
- **Diaper bag:** Although you will need something to carry your child's essentials around in, it doesn't need to be a bag specifically designed as a diaper bag. A backpack, messenger bag or large purse will do the trick, is more likely to match your personal style, and is more useful in the long run.
- **Diaper disposal system:** If you empty your trash regularly, a regular household trash can will do. For poopy diapers, flush the solid waste down the toilet to get rid of the main source of bad smells.
- **Wipe warmer:** You can sufficiently warm wipes with your hands a few seconds before using or use warm water with a reusable wipe to avoid the added expense of a wipe warmer and the electricity it requires.

This list is by no means exhaustive. When assessing whether an item is needed, consider whether you already have items that will serve the same purpose. If you really feel you need an item, consider getting it used and pass it on to someone else to use when you are done.

Most reuse retailers, including Arc's Value Village, Goodwill and Salvation Army, will not accept or sell certain baby equipment such as car seats, cribs and strollers due to product safety standards. If you are considering getting these items used, be sure to check models for recalls and research recommendations for product lifespan as it relates to safety. For example, the Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends against using cribs that are older than 10 years. Remember that there are lots of ways to reduce waste with a new baby without compromising their safety.

Diapers

Cloth diapers have come a long way in the past 10 years. Gone are the pins and oversized plastic pants, replaced by a wide array of styles and designs. In fact, they are now as easy to put on your child as their disposable counterparts and arguably much more stylish.

Cloth diapers need to be washed, so they do require more work for parents than tossing a disposable. However, as with many things related to living a low-waste lifestyle, the routine will seem easier once you get into the habit. Another good option can be to use a cloth diaper washing service such as Do Good Diapers

Cloth diapers can save money. The average family spends \$3,000 to \$4,000 per child on disposable diapers. Cloth diapers have a one-time cost of \$100 to \$1,500, depending on the style. Cloth diapers can be used for multiple children, so a family can easily save thousands of dollars by switching to cloth.

For families with kids using disposable diapers, about 50 percent of their weekly trash consists of disposable diapers. So although using reusable diapers is definitely a commitment, it has significant long-term benefits. Additionally, cloth diapers have resale value, so many people regain part of their investment by selling them when they are no longer needed. This also means you can easily find cloth diapers secondhand to save money. If you use a diaper service, you essentially rent the diapers so you do not need to worry about buying or selling them.

Also similar to many low-waste lifestyle habits, reusable diapers don't have to be an all-or-nothing choice. Many people using cloth diapers still occasionally use disposable diapers. Sometimes they will use disposable diapers overnight or while children are at daycare or on trips out of the house. Every time you use a cloth diaper it saves one from going in the trash, so you can use a combination of the two while still preventing waste.

For information on where to get cloth diapers, what styles work best and cloth diapering troubleshooting, visit the site Dirty Diaper Laundry (dirtydiaperlaundry.com).

“My family lived in a 6-unit building with shared laundry when our son was born. We wanted to use cloth diapers without grossing out all the other residents in the building, so we came up with a system of presoaking the diapers in our apartment before they were laundered. Rather than collect a big pile of diapers in a diaper bin, we used a 5 gallon pail to presoak the prefolds in a water and vinegar solution. Not only did this pre-clean the diapers a bit, it also cut back on the smells typical of storing them in a diaper pail. We also rinsed the dirty diapers prior to soaking them. Once we collected a bucket full, we dumped them all in the tub, rung them out and then took them down to the laundry to wash them. Cloth diapering was more work than disposable, but it's far cheaper in the long run, especially if you have more than one kid. And you'll never have to worry about running out late in the night to buy a pack of diapers when you realize you've run out” – dad in Minneapolis



Toys

When purchasing toys, check thrift stores, garage sales and online exchanges for gently used toys, and remember to pass them on to someone else for reuse when your child no longer needs them.. Focus on durable toys that won't break easily, and always be aware of which toys have batteries and can't go in the trash. Remember, if a toy emits lights, sound, or drives without winding up, it has a battery. Remove or replace batteries in these toys when they stop working. It may be easiest to avoid these toys as sometimes you can't access the battery and keep the toy intact, plus easily accessible batteries pose a deadly risk to children and pets if swallowed.



Consider joining a toy library, such as the Minneapolis Toy Library, to reduce waste, prevent clutter and save money. The Minneapolis Toy Library is a lending program where member families can borrow toys that are geared toward children from birth to five years old. Learn more at mplstoylibrary.org. Being a member of the toy library means your kids will get new toys every few weeks that match their development stage.

Back to school



Back-to-school time can be hectic and expensive. But luckily, new-to-you clothing and school supplies can often be purchased without compromising quality or style.

Before school starts, get a list of needed school supplies from your child's school. Reuse any supplies that you have left over from the previous year. Be sure to take a list with you for any remaining supplies to avoid buying items you don't need. Look for items made

with recycled content, durable materials and those that come in little or no packaging. If the item does come packaged, choose items with recyclable packaging.

For older students, look for required books at libraries, used book stores and online resellers. Some college bookstores also offer used books, which can lead to a big savings! For computers and tablets, consider buying used or refurbished ones while also troubleshooting and repairing any you have that are slow or damaged.

Pets



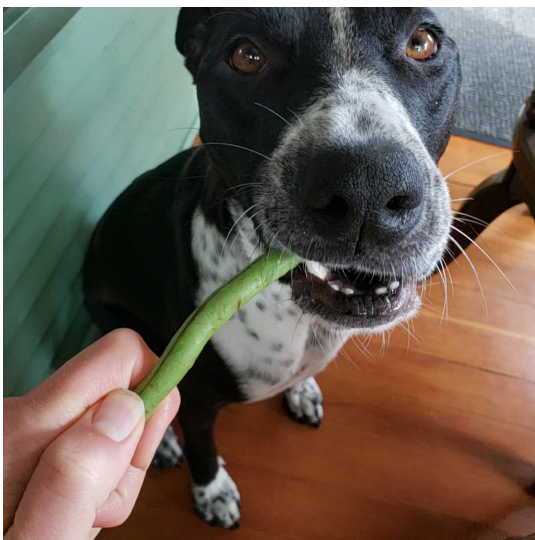
Owning a pet can create a lot of waste from packaging in addition to all the waste pets create themselves. However, there are steps you can take to reduce the amount of waste associated with having an animal companion.

Treats

Make your own treats or offer pet-safe whole foods to cut down on packaging waste. You can also grow your own catnip for your feline and air dry it for storage.

Check with your veterinarian for advice and questions, and always make sure that the “people food” you are going to serve your pet is safe for them to consume. The American Kennel Club has a list of foods that dogs can and cannot eat (akc.org/expert-advice/nutrition/fruits-vegetables-dogs-can-and-cant-eat).

Some simple options that make great snacks in moderation are carrots, raw green beans, apples, and bananas. Small bits of unseasoned and cooked lean meat, fish, or eggs are safe treats for cats.



Pet waste

Look for cat litter made from pine, cedar, wheat, walnut shells, newspaper, or corn rather than clay, which must be mined. If your cat will use it, plain sawdust from untreated wood is also a cheap and effective option that uses an otherwise wasted resource. Cat litter should go in the trash - there is no good alternative. It is not compostable, and it is not recommended to flush litter (even if it says natural or flushable) as that can clog pipes and sewer systems.

Bedding such as pine and newspaper from herbivores including alpacas, chinchillas, horses, gerbils, guinea pigs, and rabbits can be composted in your bin at home.

Rather than buying new plastic bags to collect your pet waste, reuse old bread bags, food-soiled zipper bags, or other soft plastic bags like newspaper bags or online retail bags. Or use a scooper to pick up your dog's waste. Dog waste can be flushed down the toilet or put into the trash.

Gear



Look for bowls, leashes, kennels, beds, clothing, and more that are gently used on online sale and sharing sites such as Buy Nothing groups, Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, or NextDoor or at your local animal shelter. You can also make your own pet bed, clothing, or other gear out of surplus or repurposed materials. Making your own allows you to customize them and save money.

Enrichment

Boredom can lead our pets to destructive behaviors that cause waste, such as- chewing clothing, shoes, or rugs, scratching couches and chairs, and more! There are a lot of low-waste options to entertain your pet before you run to the store and buy another toy.

For dogs, hunting and searching for food and treats is a great way to direct their energy. You can repurpose things like unlined cardboard boxes, paper egg cartons, and newspapers to hide kibble or treats and then toss the shredded paper into your compost bin once they had their fun (always supervise to make sure they don't swallow it). The Animal Humane Society has easy ideas for enrichment ([humanesociety.org/resources/easy-enrichment-ideas-pets](https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/easy-enrichment-ideas-pets)), and you can find lots of ideas from passionate pet owners online.

If you'd like to build an outdoor enclosure for your cat so they can safely get sunshine and fresh air, think about building your own or having a handy person build it. Incorporate used building materials such as wood and screens or repurposed items such as ramps and enclosures. Find some design ideas at [paws.org/library/cats/home-life/outdoor-enclosures](https://www.paws.org/library/cats/home-life/outdoor-enclosures)



"My cat is perfectly happy with toys like crumpled newspaper balls, cardboard boxes, old feathers, and even a wire from a notebook binding. It's great to just recycle or compost these things when she's done with them. She is also a big fan of two homemade toys: a crocheted ball with something crinkly inside and a little fleece pillow with catnip. You don't need to buy the whole pet store aisle of plastic toys that are ultimately trash." – Pet owner from Mound

Home management



Household tasks like managing mail, paying bills, working from home, and generally running your household result in items like paper, office supplies, or electronics to dispose of. Instead of just figuring out disposal, you can often reduce or donate items from this aspect of your life.

Reduce paper waste

Try to reduce the amount of paper you get in the mail, and don't print things like emails or driving directions if you can safely access them on a device. Practice paper reduction habits such as switching your printer default to double-sided printing, using single-sided pages again if you're only printing one page, and using scrap paper for notes instead of buying new pads of stationery.

Junk mail

To reduce junk mail, the first step is prevention. Be cautious with how often you share your contact information, and make a habit of reading privacy policies. Check online for services that will get you off national mailing lists. You can also check the piece of mail for instructions on unsubscribing. For example, Yellow Pages has directions on how to opt out of receiving their phone book. For more in-depth steps on reducing your junk mail, see the Hold the Mail brochure at hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/business/work-with-hennepin-county/environmental-literature/hold-the-mail.

Bills

Instead of getting paper bills, switch to online statements and bill paying. Just remember to practice safe password habits. Create a strong, memorable password and change it regularly to keep your information secure. If you have trouble remembering passwords, you can use an app that stores them so you don't have a paper copy sitting around for someone to find.

Shredded paper

Be mindful of the paper that you are shredding. Shredded paper is a nuisance at recycling sorting facilities because even bagged shredded paper can break open and fly off of sorting belts or contaminate other recycling streams. Only shred when it is absolutely necessary. Go paperless when possible or cut out the confidential portion of a document and recycle the rest. For the paper you do want to shred, it's best to bring it to a community shredding event or take it to a business that will shred and destroy your documents (usually for a fee). Paper shredded at an event or business is delivered directly to a paper recycler, avoiding the issues at recycling sorting facilities. The following businesses will shred and destroy your documents for a fee:

- FedEx
- Office Depot
- Shred Nations
- Staples

Office supplies and electronics

There are many options for office supplies and electronics. Recycle or refill used ink cartridges and donate usable supplies to school programs or nonprofits. Try to reuse small items like paper clips, rubber bands, binder clips and portfolios. When your printer or computer dies or you buy a new one, recycle your old one at a retailer that accepts used electronics or at a drop-off facility. You can also often replace components with upgraded versions instead of replacing the whole thing. Volunteers at Fix-It Clinics may be able to help you fix or rebuild many different electronic gadgets.

The environmental impact of smart phones comes mostly from the manufacturing process. Avoid buying new versions as frequently and instead use your phone as long as possible, making necessary updates or repairs to keep it functioning.

Cleaning around the house



Consolidate your cleaners and reduce unnecessary packaging by changing the mindset that every cleaning job requires a different cleaning product.

Basic cleaning supplies

Many common household products can make effective and inexpensive cleaners. Use the following products to clean your house from top to bottom.

- Baking soda
- Lemon or lime juice
- Washing soda
- White vinegar
- Non-scratch scrub sponge
- Drain snake
- Pumice stone



Make your own cleaners

Make a simple all-purpose cleaner by combining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar with water in a 16-ounce spray bottle. Then add $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons non-antibacterial liquid dish soap. Add lemon juice if desired.

Find additional recipes in the Green Cleaning Guide at hennepin.us/residents/recycling-hazardous-waste/reduce-household-hazardous-waste.

Buy in bulk

If making your own cleaners doesn't work well in your household, you can still reduce waste by purchasing household cleaners, dish soap, laundry detergent, and more from the bulk dispensers at co-ops or zero-waste stores. Remember to bring and refill your own containers.



Replace disposables with reusables

Choose durable, not disposable, for the following items: toilet brushes, mops, dusters, cleaning cloths, wipes, and more! Old cut-up shirts or regular washcloths can replace most disposable cleaning tools you have in your home. Microfiber cleaning cloths are also highly effective for capturing dust and leaving surfaces streak-free.



Laundry

Washing and drying

Check the tags of your clothing, linens, and accessories for washing instructions. The instructions will include the temperature to wash and dry the clothes and if they should be put in the dryer. Improper heat and impact from tumbling in a dryer can break down your clothes prematurely.



Purchase concentrated laundry detergent in liquid or powder form to reduce packaging waste or buy your own using refillable containers from the bulk section of a co-op or zero-waste store. Another cost-

effective option is to make your own – see recipes starting on page 60.

Consider going without fabric softener and instead adding white vinegar to the softener dispenser of your washing machine. Vinegar does double duty in the washer as it can also help brighten your clothes. And don't worry, the vinegar smell won't last. Minimize your use of bleach as bleach is a hazardous chemical.

Swap out dryer sheets for reusable dryer balls. You can buy these or make your own (search online for a variety of types).



You can also avoid static by hanging your clothes to dry. If you like your clothing to have a scent, use a homemade linen spray or keep a sachet of flowers, herbs, or cedar in your dresser. You can also use

pieces of cloth soaked in vinegar and essential oil as a dryer sheet replacement. They are easily stored in a glass jar to soak before and after the load of laundry is done drying. Just run them with a load and then put them back in the jar to be ready for the next use.

If you have a foldable rack or laundry line, use them to air dry as much as possible. Use cold water to preserve the fibers and color, and try not to wash your clothes if they do not need it. Unless it is soiled or stinky, you may be able to air out your clothing and wear an item a few times before it goes into the laundry.

Removing stains

If you spill, act quickly to clean it for best results. There are several options for removing stains with simple ingredients that can be purchased in bulk. Be sure to test fabrics in an unseen area before treating the stains, and take special care on delicate fabrics like wool, silk or suede.

Try the following to remove stains:

- **Baking soda and vinegar:** Works as a general stain remover. Rinse stain with lukewarm water and soak in a vinegar/water solution for up to 30 minutes before putting in the washer. You can also mix a paste of vinegar and baking soda to put on the stain.
- **Presoak in washing soda and water:** Washing soda is available in a cardboard box and is both a laundry additive, multipurpose cleaner, and general stain remover. Soak clothing following the instructions on the box before washing.
- **Hydrogen peroxide:** Use for grass, blood, coffee, and wine. Dab or spray peroxide on stain and let it sit for 15 minutes before rinsing and laundering. This may bleach colors if left on too long.
- **Freezer:** If you have gum stuck to clothing, try freezing it for several hours then breaking it off

Heat from dryers can set stains, so make sure that the stain is gone before putting it in the dryer. Or consider using the power of the sun to dry and whiten clothing. Sunshine can help fade stains on light or white fabrics.

Another easy option is to designate a pair of work or play clothes that you don't mind staining, and always wear these for especially messy jobs such as yard work or painting.

A note on dry cleaning

Many chemicals in the dry-cleaning process can be dangerous to your health and to the environment. Try to buy clothing that doesn't require dry cleaning, hand wash your clothes when possible, or look for an environmentally friendly cleaner that uses the "wet cleaning" process. Professional wet cleaning is a water-based, non-toxic, energy-efficient technology that uses computer-controlled washers and dryers to get your clothing just as clean as it would be if otherwise dry cleaned. Check with your local dry cleaner to see if they offer wet cleaning rather than dry cleaning.

Microplastics from clothing

When washing clothing, micropolastics shed from synthetic fabrics such as nylon and polyester. These microplastics are not filtered out and end up in our water. To reduce microplastics from clothing, buy clothing made from natural fibers like cotton and wool, wash your clothes less often, and hang your clothes to air-dry.

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.

Hobbies



Our hobbies can sometimes define who we are, and at minimum they are a source of joy in our lives. Make sure your hobbies align with your low-waste lifestyle goals by remembering to apply the waste hierarchy: waste prevention and reuse are first.

Be intentional about gearing up

Be intentional with how you approach your hobby, especially when it comes to equipment, gear, and supplies. Where can you limit the amount of waste that your hobby is generating? If your hobby requires equipment, go for long-lasting and high-quality, or buy used. If you are new to a sport or just testing out a hobby, try a rental program before you invest in your own equipment. You can buy used or rent instruments, sporting equipment, books, movies and crafting supplies. If you find you don't participate in your hobby anymore or have equipment you've outgrown or upgraded, declutter and donate to give someone else a chance to try that hobby, too!



Focus on activities

Focus your family time on activities instead of toys and electronics. Many activities can be free or inexpensive, and you'll spend more quality time together. Explore parks, play sports, cook a low-waste meal, make a craft with repurposed materials, or walk the dog. Check out local calendars for seasonal activities like music or movies in the parks.



Online consumption

Online shopping is so simple and rewarding that for some people it can turn into a hobby. With almost everything you want to buy available at your fingertips, falling into the trap of overconsumption is easier than ever. The good news is that there are ways to cut back or adjust online shopping habits to make them lower impact.

First, remember that our goal is waste prevention. Waste prevention is not disposal – recycling, composting, or trash. Waste prevention is better consumption. Waste prevention starts when we are deciding whether to purchase a product or not.

Before buying new, first consider if you can reuse, rent, repair, or go without the product entirely. If you decide that you do need a product, try to keep your consumption local and buy used.

A few great options that focus on reuse include:

- Joining your local Buy Nothing group to find secondhand items, borrow items, or give items to neighbors. Learn more and find a local group at buynothingproject.org.
- Looking at Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, or other online sale sites for used items
- Choosing to reuse by supporting local reuse retailers. Find reuse retailers near you at hennepin.us/choosetoreuse
- If you need to online shop for new items, be conscious and intentional about what you choose to purchase and consider these options to help limit the amount of unnecessary waste:
 - Turn off the one-click shopping option. Instead, put items in your cart and give yourself time to evaluate whether or not you really need the item.
 - If you can, bundle your shipments rather than ordering separate items that will each come in their own package. This will save on packaging waste and redundant transportation.
 - Buy items with less water content, such as bar shampoo, powered cleaners, and concentrated detergents. These items will take up less space and have less packaging associated with it, too.
- Look for items from local retailers or makers.

After you get an online order, look for ways to reuse the packaging rather than disposing of it. Small boxes can be used for organizing, and larger shipment boxes can be saved and offered to neighbors who are moving.

If you are using curbside pick-up or personal shopping options, focus on what you can do to limit the amount of waste. See if your store will use paper or reusable bags rather than plastic. Be an advocate for change by writing to your favorite businesses and letting them know that you want low-waste options for curbside pick-up.



Amazon boxes, taken by Carl Malamud via flickr.com. Used with permission under Creative Commons 2.0



Young woman working on a laptop at home, taken by Nenad Stojkovic via flickr.com. Used with permission under Creative Commons 2.0



Travel and on-the-go



Travel and being on-the-go takes you out of your normal routine, but you can still practice your low-waste habits by planning ahead to bring reusables and getting familiar with the recycling system at your destination.

Be prepared while on the go by assembling a zero-waste kit



Even if you are mastering low-waste actions at home, your best intentions may fall apart when you are on-the-go and unprepared. One simple solution is to assemble a zero-waste kit. This will help you be prepared to avoid waste no matter where you are.

Here's what your kit could contain. It may seem like a lot, but most of these items can be nestled together, and you probably already have many of the items that you'll need. Remember to add more items for additional family members or friends.

- A small bag to store the contents
- Cloth napkin
- Spoon and fork (or spork to save space!)
- A lightweight plate or bowl
- Drink containers (canning jars, water bottles, thermos, or reusable plastic cups work well)
- A few reusable containers or storage bags for snacks or to pack up leftovers

Reduce packaging waste and disposables

Pack your own snacks and beverages in lightweight reusable bags or containers to avoid over-packaged convenience foods. Some easy-to-pack, low-waste items are fruits, veggies, sandwiches, bulk trail mix and nuts. Skip the convenience stores if you need to restock and instead find a local grocery store and shop the perimeter or bulk foods section if they have one. Try using the Zero Waste Home bulk locator app at app.zerowastehome.com to find options wherever you are.



Include reusable essentials when you pack, such as small bags for purchases, reusable containers and cups or bottles, cloth napkins, and lightweight utensils. For hygiene products, such as soap and shampoo, use refillable containers instead of buying new travel-sized products. If using disposable bottles

or containers is unavoidable, don't throw them in the trash. If there isn't an accessible recycling bin, hang on to them until you can locate one.

Entertainment and souvenirs



Bring your own books or a tablet to cut down on impulse magazine and newspaper purchases. For souvenirs, resist the cheap knickknacks and instead look for durable items such as high-quality clothing or books or consumables such as wine or foods that are representative of the trip.

Take pictures of the places you visit and consider writing a travel journal to remember your experiences later rather than filling your home (or friends' homes) with things.

Eating on-the-go



When you do dine out, choose sit-down restaurants that serve their food on reusable dishes. It is also handy to bring your own containers for leftovers to avoid taking unwanted packaging waste home with you. As an extra trash-reducing step, choose to eat at restaurants that you know recycle and compost their waste.

If getting food delivered or for takeout, ask the restaurant to skip the utensils and bag if possible. Some restaurants have a comments section where you can make this request.

If you drive often or are planning a road trip, pack snacks and meals so you don't have to stop for fast food or at gas stations since these places have a lot of foods in non-recyclable packaging. Keep some easy-to-store, long-lasting snacks like nuts, granola, or dried fruit in your car for when hunger hits unexpectedly.

Flying

Air travel has a few special tips and considerations. If you can, save a copy of your ticket to your smartphone before getting to the airport. Check the airport beforehand to see if they accommodate e-ticketing. For carry-on luggage, your prepacked snacks should clear security as long as they aren't liquids or gels. Pack an empty reusable water bottle in your carry on and fill it up at a water fountain after you pass through security. Decline snacks and meals offered on the plane to avoid the excess packaging. Bring your own headphones instead of purchasing airline headsets, which aren't made to last. For TSA packing guidelines, visit [tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring](https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring).

"When I'm going out to eat, I know ahead of time that I will only eat half my meal. I've been working on getting in the habit of bringing my own container for leftovers. I get frustrated at times because I don't like carrying more things into a restaurant. However, whenever I've managed to bring my own container, I hear positive comments from strangers. Many people really appreciate the idea of using your own container instead of making extra waste by taking a to-go container. It's worth it to keep trying."

- Edina resident

Camping



Cooking outdoors and unreliable refrigeration can lead to extra food waste while camping if you are not careful. Plan out your meals for the duration of your trip and pack perishable food wisely. To save time, prepare some of your ingredients ahead of time at home, which also allows you to compost or recycle any packaging or food scraps so you don't have to think about it during your trip.



To keep your food from spoiling without refrigeration, bring a reusable cooler with ice packs, or for longer stays, refresh your ice regularly (remember to recycle the bag in plastic film recycling once it has dried out). Try not to bring more fresh food than you can eat up in a few days. Once packed, don't open the cooler more than necessary, and make sure to store all of your food in water-tight containers to prevent soggy foods and cross-contamination. If possible, keep separate, smaller coolers for meat and beverages, and keep your coolers in the shade and not inside a hot car. For more tips on how to pack a cooler, visit 100daysofrealfood.com/how-to-pack-a-cooler-safely-real-food-tips.



Bring a large water cooler and/or personal reusable water bottles rather than packing bottled water. Skip the disposables and bring reusable plates or bowls, cups, and utensils. If you plan meals for hiking, on-the-go, or plan to eat out, pack items in reusable containers. Instead of paper towels, napkins or towelettes, bring a set of old towels in different sizes—you can hang them on a line to dry them in between uses. Two bungee cords braided together and stretched between trees makes an easy-to-pack clothesline that doesn't need clothes pins – hang items by tucking their corners between the two braided cords.

Avoid cooking in aluminum foil, and instead opt for cooking irons or a designated set of cast iron pans or regular kitchen pots and pans that can handle rough use. And although cooking over an open fire can be part of the adventure, hot flames can often result in burnt foods. Choose a camp stove for more reliable meal results, especially with main courses.

For dishwashing, bring reusable tubs, scrub brushes and dish towels. Make sure to dispose of your greywater (from dish tub and handwashing) according to the policies of the campground or natural area.

For gear, opt for well-made, durable equipment and reusable options whenever possible. If you're just starting out or concerned about price, borrow from friends or consider renting some of the basics from outfitters like Hoigaard's, REI, or the University of Minnesota Recreation and Wellness Center.

Campers live by the principle of "leave no trace." In a low-waste world, that means pick up, separate and dispose of all your waste properly. Some campgrounds only have trash collection, so plan ahead to pack out your recyclables and food scraps. A good place to store organic waste is in your emptied food containers inside of the cooler. When the trip is over and you are back home, take any hazardous wastes like empty fuel tanks and old rechargeable batteries to a drop-off location.

Special events



A lot of waste can be created at celebrations and gatherings. For example, household waste increases by 25 percent during the holiday season. Nationally, an additional one million tons of waste per week is generated during the holidays. But, it is possible to have special events such as holidays, birthdays, graduation parties, retirement parties and weddings and still avoid waste.

Planning tips

High-waste	Low-waste
Sending paper invites.	→ Invite people via email, phone, or social media.
Cooking massive amounts of food.	→ Plan carefully and only cook enough food for the people coming. Use Save the Food's Guestimator tool to help you plan: savethefood.com/guestimator
Throwing out leftovers.	→ Send leftovers home with guests. You can even ask guests to bring their own storage containers. Or, save leftovers for later in the refrigerator or freezer.
Using disposable plates, cups, bowls and utensils.	→ Use reusable dishware and utensils.
Buying new games for attendees to play.	→ Rent inflatable or large carnival-type games for kids. Ask attendees to bring their own games to share.
Having trash cans scattered around the event space.	→ Clearly mark all trash and recycling containers, and always keep them next to each other to make sorting easier.
Using single-use, disposable decorations such as balloons and banners	→ Decorate with items that can be reused, recycled or composted, are made from used or recycled materials, or given to guests to take home.

Find more tips for planning green events at hennepin.us/eventrecycling

"For National Night Out, my block started providing recycling and organics bins. But after seeing all the paper plates and plastic cups that were used, I encouraged my neighbors to bring their own reusable dishes and cups to the event to reduce the waste we generated."

– South Minneapolis resident

Home remodeling



Home remodeling can be a big source of waste. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the amount of construction and demolition waste generated in the United States is more than double the amount of household trash generated annually. Remodeling projects accounts for an estimated 22 percent of all the construction and demolition waste. With a plan and a little extra time, much of that waste can be avoided or diverted for reuse or recycling.

Reduce

Less is more. Smaller homes generate less waste over a lifetime of use and maintenance. Spend more per square foot on higher quality materials and finishes instead of maximizing the total square footage of your project. The website notsobighouse.com is a great resource for designing spaces that are not as big as you thought you needed to perfectly suit the way you live. Skip the latest must-haves and stick to simple, classic designs and finishes that endure over time.



Reuse

Many furnishings and finishes can be reused rather than trashed. For example, cabinets and vanities can take on a new life with a fresh coat of paint or stain and new hardware. Sinks and tubs can be refreshed by replacing the faucet.

Reusing building materials preserves what is referred to as the embodied energy of the materials. Embodied energy is the energy used by all the processes involved in producing a material, from harvesting natural resources to manufacturing to delivery. Reusing materials you already have not only reduces waste but also saves money.

If you aren't able to reuse what you already have, you can still incorporate reuse and avoid the embodied emissions of new products into your project by buying used. Buying used building materials closes the loop on the reuse system and sends a message that salvaged products are valued. Plus, used building materials can provide unique character and one-of-a-kind style to your project.

Cabinets, flooring, sinks, light fixtures and much more can be found at used building material stores across the metro. Architectural Antiques, Bauer Brothers Salvage, Better Futures Minnesota, City Salvage, Guided Salvage, Habitat for Humanity ReStore and Scrapbox Salvage are all options for used and period-specific building materials. Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace and online garage sale groups also have used or surplus building materials.

Visit hennepin.us/salvage for home improvement and repair organizations, or check the event listing at hennepin.us/choosetoreuse for upcoming sales. Hennepin County offers grant funding for projects that incorporate used building materials. Learn more at hennepin.us/building-reuse.

Donation and deconstruction

In addition to selling used building materials, many home improvement retailers also accept donations, and some offer pick-up service. Make sure you share your reuse plans with your contractor so items aren't destroyed during removal.

Bauer Brothers Salvage, Better Futures Minnesota, and the Birch Group also offer deconstruction services, which is a process that involves carefully taking a building apart to preserve the materials for reuse. Deconstruction prioritizes salvaging materials for reuse and then recycling what is not reusable. The process minimizes the amount of unusable and non-recyclable materials that end up in a landfill.

This method can be used rather than demolition for both partial and full building removal. Deconstruction can take longer and cost more, but tax credits for donating the building materials help reduce the cost, and this method can divert as much as 85 to 90 percent of the building material. Hennepin County also offers grant funding for deconstruction projects. Learn more at hennepin.us/building-reuse.

Recycling

After you've reduced and reuse as much as possible, there are recycling opportunities for many materials. The gold standard for recycling construction and demolition debris is to sort the materials onsite and then have them sent to the various processors of those materials.

If your site only has room for a mixed-waste dumpster, make sure the dumpster is going to a construction and demolition waste processing facility in the Twin Cities that diverts materials for recycling: Broadway Resource Recovery (Atomic) or Dem-Con. These recycling processors take mixed construction and demolition waste, sort it, and divert 60 to 70 percent of the material from landfills.

Let your contractor know before work starts that you want the material recycled at one of these places, and ask for the receipts to ensure it went where you specified.

Tools

Become a member of a tool library or borrow tools from your family, neighbors, or friends. The Minnesota Tool Library has more than 5,000 tools available for its members to borrow. Learn more at mntoolibrary.org.



Moving and renting



Moving can be a stressful and busy time. Luckily, there are many things you can do to reduce waste and stress while moving. There are also many things you can do to spruce up a space you are renting without accumulating a lot of things.

Prevent waste while moving

Take the following steps to prevent waste while moving:

- Give yourself enough time to sort through your things, dividing them into “keep” and “get rid of” categories.
- For things you are getting rid of, donate or sell them if they are in good condition and properly dispose of the rest (search the Green Disposal Guide at hennepin.us/green-disposal-guide to find options).
- When packing, try to find boxes and packing materials from your community by posting on online neighborhood or sharing sites, checking with local stores, and saving up boxes you get from deliveries. Or look into rental options for durable plastic boxes from companies such as U-Haul, Blue Box, Banana Box or Frog Box. Use soft items like pillows, blankets, and towels as packing materials.
- Clearly label boxes with what they will go in and an inventory of what’s packed inside. Keep fragile items safe by packing them in sturdy boxes and wrapping them with soft packing materials. Pack an “open first” box with essentials for the first few days to avoid having to buy duplicates.
- When unpacking, give away your moving boxes and supplies and properly dispose of any waste left behind. This includes bringing any hazardous waste to a drop-off facility or collection event.
- Give yourself time to settle into your new place to make the best decision about additional items you need. Visit local reuse retailers or check online sale or sharing sites to find new-to-you items for your home. Visit Choose to Reuse at hennepin.us/choosetoreuse to find local reuse retailers.



Enhancing your space in rentals

If you are renting a home or apartment, you probably want to personalize the space. But if your living situation is temporary, investing in items specific to that space could be a waste of time, money, and resources.

The rise of social media and lifestyle influencers can mean increased pressure to have perfectly coordinated interior design, even if you are still in college or moving to your first adult home. Try to let go of the idea of meeting all the latest trends with cheap, poorly made items and instead focus on a few well-made items you love.

To fill in the rest of the space and make it your own, think about ways you can repurpose items you already have or find secondhand or natural décor. A few do-it-yourself (DIY) ideas:

- **Thrift store oddities:** You can find lots of great treasures at the thrift store to add highlights to your space. This is a great option if you like decorative items and knickknacks but don't want to buy new.
- **Plants:** Liven up your space with live plants! Not only do plants add lovely greenery, they also help clean the air you breathe. Get cuttings from your green-thumbed friends or family or look for people giving away and selling plants online.
- **Dried flowers/leaves/branches:** Create a statement centerpiece for a counter or table using natural items. Make sure you collect these items legally and sustainably.
- **Rugs and throws:** Getting a different rug for your room or a new blanket for the chair or couch are quick ways to change up your space and add color. These are often easy to find secondhand.
- **Lighting:** The way you light a space can totally change the ambience. Vintage pieces or fixed-up thrift store finds are better options for the environment than buying a flimsy new lamp. If you have an existing lamp that stopped working, bring it to a Fix-It Clinic before you toss it. Lamps are easy to fix, and you can switch up lampshades to make it new again.



Community and advocacy



Working on your own waste is great, but as you know, you aren't the only one with a garbage can! You can have a bigger impact by helping others start or make strides on their own low-waste journeys or advocating to change systems that create so much waste in the first place. Use your influence by getting connected with your local community, telling your story and sharing knowledge, leading by example, and advocating for change.

Connect with your neighbors

Get to know your neighbors through Nextdoor, neighborhood Facebook groups, sports, clubs, and activities, and events such as National Night Out. You can also join specific interest groups focused on things like “buy nothing” or gardening. Use the people you know as resources for borrowing, lending, and selling things such as home goods or clothing. Not only will you have more shared resources at your fingertips, but you are helping to normalize sharing and borrowing.

Share what you know

Sharing your story and the resource you've learned about can inspire others and bring changes to places you frequent, such as your work, place of worship, or kids' school.

Tell your family, friends and neighbors what you are doing. If people ask, explain the low-waste lifestyle changes you are trying to make. Share on social media or offer to speak to a community group.

You can teach or organize another trainer to teach about recycling and composting, waste prevention, or any of the many life skills that are useful for preventing waste, such as cooking, mending, or gardening. Organize a workplace training or do an event with your child's scout troop, 4H club, ecology, or environmental club.

Lead by example

For some people, actions speak louder than words. Bring the practices you have at home on-the-go by implementing a waste prevention project at an organization or volunteering your time doing waste prevention work.

The following are ideas on projects to complete at your workplace, school, or a similar organization:

- Start or improve your workplace's recycling or organics program. Make sure there are enough recycling bins, put up informational signs, or set up a system to use reusable dishes.
- Plan events to avoid single-use plastic bottles, dishware, decorations, or gifts and trinkets.
- If you host a catered event, make sure your company or caterer has a process in place to donate excess food. Second Harvest Heartland is one organization that uses a platform called MealConnect to get commercially produced excess food to people who need it.



There are many ways to volunteer your time that actively results in less waste. Here are a few ideas:

- Help rescue food with TC Food Justice and The Food Group. The Food Group also has a Glean Team that helps harvest food directly from farms.
- Spread awareness about plastic waste by hosting or joining a litter pickup event. Use the Adopt-a-River toolkit (freshwater.org/aar-toolkit) to plan a cleanup event.
- Volunteer with a sharing and reuse organizations, such as the MN Tool Library, Minneapolis Toy Library, and Minnesota Cloth Diaper Bank.



Hennepin County has a variety of resources and programs that can help you take action in your community:

- Hennepin County Community Recycling Ambassadors are trained volunteers who advocate for the 3Rs in their community by setting up or improving waste diversion efforts and educating others. Learn more at hennepin.us/recycling-ambassadors.
- Business, school and multifamily recycling grants are available to help you set up recycling and organics programs as well as other waste reduction efforts. Learn more at hennepin.us/businessrecycling, hennepin.us/schoolrecycling, and hennepin.us/apartmentsrecycle
- Environmental education grants are available to organizations to educate, engage and empower residents to make positive environmental changes in their daily lives. Topics include waste reduction and recycling, energy conservation, protecting land and water, reducing and properly disposing of hazardous waste, and improving air and water quality. Learn more at hennepin.us/greenpartners



Advocate for change

Although the Zero Waste Challenge is primarily focused on taking personal action, there are many opportunities to use your voice to ask for change on a broader level. Here are few simple ways to be a vocal advocate for reducing waste:

- Contact your local representatives, including city council, county commissioners, and state representatives, and tell them about the changes you want to see to reduce waste.
- Provide constructive feedback to restaurants that use a lot of single-use packaging, or connect them with resources to recycle, compost, donate food and prevent waste.
- Provide feedback to grocery stores, department stores, or anywhere you would like to see them stop offering plastic bags, stock plastic-free items, or offer more options that support a plastic-free lifestyle.
- Contact stores and product manufacturers to ask them to use recycled content in their products and packaging.
- Use your social media influence for good by sharing information about your personal journey or by supporting businesses making positive change.

Setting zero-waste goals

Write down specific goals on what you want to change and how it will happen. You can create area goals (for example, by rooms of the house), goals for each member of the family, or just a progression of steps to take from easy to harder as you make your zero waste journey.

Write down what you're going to do to make a change, when, and how often it will happen.

Goal	Action	Time frame	Were you successful? Track each time this action occurred (or didn't)	Notes, troubleshooting
Reduce the number of bags we throw out	Bring (and use) my reusable bags	Every time I get groceries	1 yes 2 no 3 y/n 4 y/n 5 y/n	Problem: I forget my bags inside the house between shopping trips. Solution: When I unpack groceries, I put the bags next to my keys
Eliminate paper towel waste	Stop buying paper towels and use a cloth instead	When my paper towels run out, I won't buy any more		I had to buy a few wash cloths but now we are paper towel free!

Or you could write a statement that includes a goal, action, and time frame.

Examples:

- I will use reusable bags when I go to get groceries instead of taking plastic grocery bags.
- I will eliminate my paper towel waste by using a cloth and washing it.
- When the kids need new sports equipment, we will go to a secondhand store before buying new.
- When I go to the grocery store, I will bring a container to buy flour in bulk.
- I will use green cleaners to replace at least half of my household cleaners.
- Alejandra will go through her toys twice a year and donate the ones that are no longer her favorite.
- William will buy a reusable razor and only keep a few disposable razors for business trips.
- We will use washable Tupperware for Hassan's school lunch and snacks instead of zippered plastic bags.

Remember to check in on your goals. Keep yourself accountable by setting up calendar reminders, using a tracking app, or getting an accountability buddy (family member, friend, colleague, etc.).

Waste audit: What is in my trash?

Take a look at what is in or could be in your waste stream by going through each room and writing down all of the different items you find. You could either focus on what is currently in your waste stream by taking a look at your trash, recycling and organics recycling, or you could assess what waste you could have by looking at the various items in a room. In the next column, decide if it should be recycled, composted, thrown away as trash, or if there is another option (for example, take plastic bags to a drop-off collection or donate usable clothing). In the third column, decide if the waste is something you can reduce or stop using by finding an alternative. In the final column, list your alternative to using that product if it applies.

Kitchen

Item	Category (trash, recycling, organics, other)	Can you replace or reduce?	Alternatives (item or action)

Bathroom

Item	Category (trash, recycling, organics, other)	Can you replace or reduce?	Alternatives (item or action)

Laundry room

Item	Category (trash, recycling, organics, other)	Can you replace or reduce?	Alternatives (item or action)

Home office

Item	Category (trash, recycling, organics, other)	Can you replace or reduce?	Alternatives (item or action)

Other

Item	Category (trash, recycling, organics, other)	Can you replace or reduce?	Alternatives (item or action)

Waste sort guide

A waste sort is a process used to assess your household's waste. The sort is part of understanding how much and what kind of waste your family is generating. For the waste sort, you will collect and set aside waste for an entire week. At the end of the week, you will sort the waste to better understand what your household is generating and how well you are sorting your waste.

Pre-sort

- Prepare for sorting organics/compostable goods.
 - Make space in your refrigerator or freezer to store the organics you'll collect over the week
 - Go over organics collection with your household and make the collection point clear to all!
- Determine a spot to store the waste. Do not put waste in your car; set it aside in your garage or basement to be sorted later.
- Identify and add bins for "gross factor" wastes like pet poop and other wastes. Your future self will thank you. It's only for a week, so use what you have, such as an old bucket or simply a plastic bag next to the trash.

Collect waste

- Collect for seven days – from trash day to trash day. **Try to follow your typical habits.**
- On the last day, go through the fridge to identify any food that's spoiled that you'll need to count in the sort.
- Set aside the waste from these seven days for the sort.

Complete the sort

1. Set up your sorting space.
 - a. Select hard surface such as a table, floor, or outside if weather permits.
 - b. Lay out plastic tarp to make cleanup easy.
2. Lay out the recycling
 - a. Re-sort the pile to pull out any trash, compostable items, household hazardous waste items, or reusable/repairable items.
 - b. Weigh each of the categories, and record them in the waste sort tracking sheet.
 - c. Take pictures of the groups of items.
3. Lay out all the trash
 - a. Re-sort the pile to pull out any recyclable items, compostable items, household hazardous waste items, or reusable/repairable items.
 - b. Weigh each of the categories, and record them in the waste sort tracking sheet.
 - c. Take pictures of the groups of items
4. Lay out the organics
 - a. Re-sort the pile to pull out any trash, recyclable items, household hazardous waste items, or reusable/repairable items.
 - b. Weigh each of the categories, and record them in the waste sort tracking sheet.
 - c. Take pictures of the groups of items

Waste Sort Data Tracking Sheet			
RECYCLING			
Material	Weight (lbs)	Total Weight	Proportion (%)
Trash		T=	T/TOTAL=
Recycling (plastic, metal, glass, paper, cardboard, cartons)		R=	R/TOTAL=
Organics (food, paper towel and soiled paper waste)		O=	O/TOTAL=
Household hazardous waste (batteries, paint, aerosol cans, electronics, etc.)		HHW=	HHW/TOTAL=
Reuseable, donate, or repair items		Reuse=	Reuse/TOTAL=
Other (pre-sorted streams)		Alt=	Alt/TOTAL=
		TOTAL=	
TRASH			
Material	Weight (lbs)	Total Weight	Proportion (%)
Trash		T=	T/TOTAL=
Recycling (plastic, metal, glass, paper, cardboard, cartons)		R=	R/TOTAL=
Organics (food, paper towel and soiled paper waste)		O=	O/TOTAL=
Household hazardous waste (batteries, paint, aerosol cans, electronics, etc.)		HHW=	HHW/TOTAL=
Reuseable, donate, or repair items		Reuse=	Reuse/TOTAL=
Other (pre-sorted streams)		Alt=	Alt/TOTAL=
		TOTAL=	
ORGANICS/COMPOSTABLE ITEMS			
Material	Weight (lbs)	Total Weight	Proportion (%)
Trash		T=	T/TOTAL=
Recycling (plastic, metal, glass, paper, cardboard, cartons)		R=	R/TOTAL=
Organics (food, paper towel and soiled paper waste)		O=	O/TOTAL=
Household hazardous waste (batteries, paint, aerosol cans, electronics, etc.)		HHW=	HHW/TOTAL=
Reuseable, donate, or repair items		Reuse=	Reuse/TOTAL=
Other (pre-sorted streams)		Alt=	Alt/TOTAL=
		TOTAL=	
Diversion pre-sort	$(\text{Total Recycling} + \text{Total Organics/Compostable}) / (\text{Total Recycling} + \text{Total Organics/Compostable} + \text{Total Trash})$		
Potential Diversion	$(R + R + R + O + O + O) / (\text{Total Recycling} + \text{Total Organics/Compostable} + \text{Total Trash})$		

Recipes

Making things at home can cut down on packaging waste and save you money. The following recipes are included to help you get started.

Food

- Pizza dough
- Stovetop popcorn
- Yogurt
- Mustard
- Infused water and herbal teas

Personal care products

- Beeswax lotion
- Laundry detergent
- Shaving cream
- Hair care alternatives

Pizza dough



Turn pizza into more of a special occasion while eliminating plastic-coated frozen or cardboard pizza boxes. Making pizzas from scratch is also a fun way to get kids involved in the kitchen. They'll have fun squishing and kneading the soft dough, and they get to put on exactly the toppings that suit their tastes (potentially meaning less whining or wasted food!). You can even split the dough and let everyone in the family make their own personal pizza.

Ingredients

- 2 tsp dry yeast
- 1 c warm water
- 1 tsp honey or sugar
- 2 Tbsp olive or other oil
- 2 ½ c unbleached white flour (replace 1 cup of white with whole wheat flour for a heartier crust)
- ½ tsp garlic or onion powder
- Optional: 1 tsp each or mixture of dried herbs such as basil, rosemary or oregano
- Pizza toppings (sauce, cheese, etc.)

Directions

Activate yeast by stirring it with the warm water and honey in a small bowl. The water should be warmer than lukewarm but not too hot or you may kill the yeast. If you have a thermometer, aim for a temperature of 100-115 degrees Fahrenheit. Cover the bowl with a lid or towel and let it sit for 5-10 minutes. You should see it begin to froth or foam.

Meanwhile, mix flour with garlic or onion powder and any other spices in a large ceramic or glass bowl. Add oil and the yeast mixture, stirring until it begins to form a dough. Sprinkle some flour on the counter and put the dough down, kneading it until thoroughly mixed. If it is too sticky, keep sprinkling on more flour and knead until it doesn't stick to your hands. Oil the outside of the dough ball, place it back into the bowl, cover with a cloth and set it in a warm place for 15-30 minutes to rise. You can turn the oven to a low setting then turn it off and put the bowl inside or place the bowl near the oven vent on top of the range.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees and oil a cookie sheet or pizza pan. Take the dough ball from the bowl and flatten it

onto your pan, using the palm of your hand to spread it out from the middle. You can poke the surface of the dough to prevent bubbling. Once the oven has heated, pre-cook only the pizza dough for 8 minutes, then take out and assemble your toppings. Be careful, the pan and dough will be hot! Place the almost-finished pizza back into the oven and bake for an additional 10-15 minutes or until the cheese melts and the crust starts to turn golden brown.

Enjoy!

You can also make more dough than you will use and freeze the unused portion in a plastic zip bag. Just follow the directions up until you oil the ball and place back in the bowl- instead, oil and place it in a zippered bag, squeeze the air out, and freeze it. To use your frozen dough, remove from freezer and let it thaw in the fridge. Take it out, spread on a pan, and cook as normal.

Cooked pizza also saves well in the freezer. Reheat in a toaster oven for crispier results- microwaving will heat faster but leave the dough soft.

Supplies

- Small bowl
- Large bowl
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Cookie sheet or pizza pan

Stovetop popcorn



Adapted from [simplyrecipes.com/recipes/perfect_popcorn/](https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/perfect_popcorn/)

Makes approximately 6 cups popped

Ingredients

3 Tbsp coconut, peanut, or canola oil (you need a high smoke point oil - don't use olive oil)

1/3 cup of high quality popcorn kernels (purchase from a bulk bin!)

Seasonings (butter, salt, pepper, herbs, to taste)

Directions

Heat the oil in your saucepan or pot on medium to medium-high heat. Put a few popcorn kernels into the oil and cover the pan. When the kernels pop, add the rest in an even layer. Remove from heat and wait 30 seconds, then place back on the burner. Put on the lid and gently shake the pan once you start to hear a lot of popping (this keeps things from burning). When there are several seconds between pops, remove the popcorn from the heat and place into a large bowl. Add melted butter, salt, and any other seasonings, and toss.

Here are some tasty combinations to spice up your popcorn life:

- Cinnamon and sugar
- Parmesan, rosemary and garlic salt
- Lime juice and salt
- Sriracha and honey
- Curry powder, taco seasoning, or other spice mixes

If you happen to have a Whirley Pop popcorn maker or find one at a garage sale, follow the official directions online! You can also use an air popper to avoid using oil.

[wabashvalleyfarms.com/instructions.php?sel=whirleypop](https://www.wabashvalleyfarms.com/instructions.php?sel=whirleypop)

Supplies

Large saucepan or pot with a lid



Yogurt



Ingredients

Half gallon of whole milk
¼ cup plain yogurt with live cultures

Supplies

Large saucepan or pot
Candy or food thermometer

Directions

Pour the milk into a large saucepan and slowly bring it up to 180 degrees. Be careful not to boil the milk. If you do not have a thermometer, heat the milk until it begins to steam and froth but not boil. Remove from heat and cool to 110-115 degrees, which still feels hot but not uncomfortable to the touch (be very careful if you test it this way). Add plain yogurt and mix together with a spoon, then let it sit in a warm place for 5-8 hours. To incubate the yogurt, you can use a thermos, place the pot inside your oven with the light on, place inside a cooler, or wrap it with a towel. You can also use a yogurt maker if you have one. When the yogurt has thickened, put it in an airtight container and refrigerate. If you notice the whey separating (a thin, yellowish liquid), just mix it back in. This is normal. Homemade yogurt can also be a bit runnier and tangier than the store-bought variety (store yogurt often has thickening agents and a lot of sweetener) - just add honey or maple syrup to taste, or mix in a bit of jam or fresh fruit.

Benefits of making yogurt at home

- You can recycle a milk jug with its cap instead of recycling multiple yogurt tubs and trashing the foil or plastic inner seal. This saves on some waste and is a preferred recyclable plastic
- It is cheaper than store-bought (compare the price of ½ gallon of milk to two quarts of yogurt)
- You can avoid additional colors and additives, plus control the amount of sugar in your yogurt

Mustard



Adapted from The Homemade Pantry: 101 Foods You Can Stop Buying & Start Making by Alana Chernila

Makes 1½ cups

Ingredients

½ c. brown or yellow mustard seeds, or both! (buy in bulk from your grocery store)

1/3 c red wine vinegar (other vinegars will do)

2 garlic cloves, minced (optional)

2 tsp salt (or to taste)

3 tablespoons honey (or to taste)

Directions

Put the mustard seeds in a bowl and add enough water to cover all of the seeds by several inches. Let it sit on the counter and soak for at least half a day. Drain water from the bowl, then combine all ingredients plus ¼ cup water and blend until smooth. You can reserve some of the soaked mustard seeds to add in after blending for a chunkier mixture. If it is too thick, add a dash more vinegar or water. Put the mustard into a sealed container and refrigerate for up to 2 months. Your mustard will be very strong for the first few days.

This recipe is highly customizable. Vary it by trying different kinds of vinegars and sweeteners, replacing the water with beer, wine or champagne (for adults), and/or adding a tablespoon or two of finely chopped fresh herbs like dill, thyme, oregano, basil or rosemary.

If you have a mortar and pestle or small food processor, you can easily cut the recipe down and make just a taste of different variations to find your favorite blend.

Supplies

Blender or food processor; a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle will also work

Infused water and herbal teas



Infused water

Adapted from dish.allrecipes.com/fresh-ideas-for-making-infused-water/

Flavor water to make it more interesting! If you do it yourself you can cut out bottled drinks like soda, bags and packaging for tea, and prepackaged drink packets. All it takes is water from your tap and fruits or leaves that you can compost when finished. Remember to wash your fruits, veggies and herbs and choose organic if possible. If you use items grown from your yard, make sure they haven't been sprayed with pesticides.

Mix an assortment of fruits, vegetables and herbs together. Add to cool or cold water and let sit for up to two hours at room temperature and then refrigerate.

Try a common combination:

- Mint leaves, sliced lime and strawberries
- Blueberries and sliced oranges
- Raspberries and sliced lemon
- Sliced cucumber and mint leaves

Other ingredients

Rosemary, grapefruit, pineapple, pears, lavender, ginger root



Herbal infusions or "teas"

Skip the tea bag or bottled teas and try making your own infusion of fresh edible leaves, flowers and spices in water! You can drink the tea hot or chill it and add a dash of sugar for a refreshing summer drink. Place a few leaves or pieces of the following ingredients loosely into a mug and fill with almost boiling water. You can also use an infuser, mesh ball, or reusable tea bag to contain it. Steep for five minutes or longer and drink. Remember to wash your fruits, veggies and herbs and choose organic if possible. If you use items grown from your yard, make sure they haven't been sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers.

Try these singly or in combination:

- Common herbs: peppermint, basil, sage, lemon verbena, lemongrass, rosemary, oregano
- Spices: ginger, cinnamon, cloves
- Flowers: Chamomile, rose petals and rose hips, lavender, calendula, bee balm, hibiscus
- Common backyard plants: Raspberry and blackberry leaves, pineapple weed, catnip, dandelion

Beeswax lotion



Adapted from A Sonoma Garden asonomagarden.com/2011/09/19/how-to-make-an-easy-beeswax-lotion/

Ingredients

- 1 c. olive oil
- ½ c. coconut oil
- ½ c. beeswax pellets
- ½ t. Vitamin E oil (approx. 5 capsules' worth)
(optional, preservative)
- 20 drops essential oil of your choice (optional, for fragrance)

Supplies

- Pint-sized jar
- Small saucepan
- Measuring cups

Directions

Place olive oil, coconut oil and beeswax pellets in a pint sized mason jar. Create a double-boiler by placing the jar inside of a small saucepan and filling it up with water until it reaches an inch from the top of the jar. Make sure not to get any water into the jar. Heat over medium low and stir until melted. Remove from heat and let your mixture cool to room temperature, stirring every 15 minutes until it is cooled. Optional: stir in Vitamin E and essential oils at this point.

You can also check out another recipe for hand lotion and adapted from A Sonoma Garden at asonomagarden.com/2009/02/26/how-to-make-handmade-handlotion-w-label-download/

Laundry detergent



Ingredients

½ c washing soda (not the same as detergent or baking soda. Look for this in the laundry aisle)

½ c borax or baking soda (borax can also be found with laundry section)

1 c liquid castile soap

Water

Directions

Put the washing soda and borax or baking soda in a gallon-sized jug and fill almost to the top with warm water. Then add the liquid soap, put on the cap and mix gently. Note: if you add the soap at the beginning you will get a sudsy mess!

Use approximately ¼ cup per load of laundry.

You can recycle the boxes for washing soap, borax and baking soda, and buy bulk castile soap at co-ops. Bottles of liquid castile soap such as Dr. Bronner's are also available at stores like Walmart and Target.

Supplies

Gallon jug

Measuring cups

Shaving cream

Adapted from mommypotamus.com/natural-homemade-shaving-cream/

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup coconut oil
- 1/3 cup shea butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons liquid castile soap

Supplies

- Small saucepan
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Medium bowl
- Hand mixer or stand mixer

Directions

In a small saucepan, melt shea butter and coconut oil over low heat, stirring until fully melted. Add olive oil and mix, then remove from heat. Pour the mixture into a medium-sized bowl and refrigerate until it hardens. Take out of the fridge and whip with a hand mixer or stand mixer, using a rubber scraper to scrape down the sides. Whip until the mixture is fluffy, then add the castile soap in until blended. Transfer the shaving cream to an airtight container and store in a cool place.

Hair care alternatives



Shampoo

Take 2 tablespoons of baking soda and add water to make a loose paste (wetter than toothpaste but not liquid). Massage into scalp like you would use shampoo. Rinse. Note that the baking soda paste will not form suds like regular shampoo.

Conditioner

Fill a spray bottle with one part apple cider vinegar and three parts water. Shake each time before use. Spray over hair after shampooing and let sit for a bit, then rinse out.

Coconut oil or olive oil can be used in place of gels and conditioners as well to smooth hair, reduce frizz, and add shine. Place a couple of drops in the palm of your hand, rub your hands together, and run fingers through your hair. If you're using solid coconut oil, use your fingers to scoop up a tiny amount and rub between your hands to melt it. Experiment to find the right amount; you can easily overdo it.

Dry shampoo

Some people use "dry shampoo" to keep their hair looking fresh between washes. Try using cornstarch or arrowroot powder in place of dry shampoos, which often come in non-recyclable or aerosol containers. Dab some starch onto your fingertips and apply to your scalp to absorb excess oils. For dark hair, mix in a bit of cocoa powder or apply straight to your hair. If you use too much, brush your hair or rub it out with a towel. You can store your dry shampoo in a sealable container that you keep in the bathroom.

References and additional resources

Blogs

Personal accounts of zero waste journeys, including tips, products and recipes

- 100 Days of Real Food 100daysofrealfood.com
Healthy eating blog, focuses on kids' meals and frugal shopping
- Cero Waste Cindy cerowastecindy.com
Sustainability advocate and garden educator
- Going Zero Waste goingzerowaste.com/blog
Tips to get started and how to make ongoing improvements.
- My Plastic-Free Life myplasticfreelife.com
Resources on avoiding plastics
- Queer Brown Vegan queerbrownvegan.com
Intersectional environmental educator
- Wasteland Rebel wastelandrebel.com
Simple zero waste life hacks
- Zero Waste Chef zerowastechef.com
Cooking without plastic or processed foods
- Zero Waste Guy zerowasteguy.com
Tips and tricks for reducing waste and saving money
- Zero Waste Home zerowastehome.com
A family's journey to live a low-waste lifestyle

Other websites:

- Buy Me Once buymeonce.com
Website that highlights a wide variety of products with lifetime warranties.
- Environmental Working Group ewg.org/guides/cleaners
Searchable toxicity database for different chemicals in household cleaners, beauty products, etc.
- Earth 911: earth911.com/living-well-being/zero-waste-how-to-make-less-trash
Website offers tips on how to recycle, prevent pollution, and protect the environment. Has tutorials on DIY products, cleaners, and eco crafts.
- Tree Hugger treehugger.com/green-home/zero-waste-backbone-needed.html
Sustainability lifestyle website and news source.
- Minnesota Grown minnesotagrown.com
An online directory listing farmers markets and local producers.

- Save the Food campaign savethefood.com
Campaign developed by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Ad Council to address food waste in America. The website contains tips and information about avoiding wasting food.
- Love Food Hate Waste lovefoodhatewaste.com
A UK-based website with recipes, storage information and tips on reducing food waste at home.
- Hennepin County Green Disposal Guide hennepin.us/greendisposalguide
Provides options for the best way to recycle, reuse or dispose of items from your home.
- The Freecycle Network freecycle.org
Website to connect people and promote a sharing economy.
- Craigslist craigslist.org/about/sites
Online classifieds website
- NextDoor: nextdoor.com/
Neighborhood social/sharing group

Documentaries

- A Plastic Ocean*: plasticoceans.org/about-a-plastic-ocean
Documents the global effects of plastic pollution and highlights workable technologies and innovative solutions that everyone can do, to create a cleaner and greener ocean.
- Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story: foodwastemovie.com
75 minute documentary about food waste and food rescue
- Landfillharmonic: Symphony of the Human Spirit*: landfillharmonicmovie.com
The story of the Recycled Orchestra of Cateura, a Paraguayan musical group that plays instruments made entirely out of garbage pieces found in the landfill where their community is settled.
- The Story of Stuff: youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroiqqM
Short online movie about how we make, use and throw away products
- The True Cost*: truecostmovie.com/
A story about the clothing industry and its impacts
- Wasted! the Story of Food Waste*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLXgXmnKVzE
A trip around the world showing the 1.3 billion tons of food that gets thrown out each year and the people fighting hardest to prevent it.

*Also available at Hennepin County Libraries

Books

All of these are available through the Hennepin County Library system as hard copies. Some are accessible as e-books as well.

- 101 Ways to Go Zero Waste by Kathryn Kellogg
- All You Need Is Less: The Eco-friendly Guide to Guilt-free Green Living and Stress-free Simplicity by Somerville, Madeleine
- An Almost Zero-Waste Life by Megean Weldon
- Cook More, Waste Less: Zero-Waste Recipes to Use Up Groceries, Tackle Food Scraps, and Transform Leftovers by Christine Tizzard
- Craftcycle: 100+ Eco-friendly Projects and Ideas for Everyday Living by Heidi Boyd
- Eco Dog: Healthy Living for your Pet by Corbett Marshall
- The Eco-nomical Baby Guide: Down-to-earth Ways for Parents to Save Money and the Planet by Joy Hatch
- The Eco Lifestyle Handbook by Sarah Callard
- Eco Thrifty: Cheaper, Greener Choices for a Happier, Healthier Life by Deborah Niemann
- Green Guide Families: The Complete Reference for Eco-friendly Parents by Catherine Zandonella
- Green Tea Living: A Japan-inspired Guide to Eco-friendly Habits, Health and Happiness by Toshimi A. Kayaki
- The homemade pantry: 101 foods you can stop buying & start making by Alana Chernila
- Lemons and Lavender: The Eco Guide to Better Homekeeping by Billee Sharp
- The New Art of Living Green: How to Reduce your Carbon Footprint and Live a Happier More Eco-Friendly life by Erica Palmacrantz Aziz
- Ready, Set, Green: Eight Weeks to Modern Eco-living From the Experts at TreeHugger.com by Graham Hill
- Recycle and Play: Awesome DIY Zero Waste Projects to Make for Kids by Agnes Hsu
- Waste-free Kitchen Handbook: A Guide to Eating Well and Saving Money by Wasting Less Food by Dana Gunders
- Zero Waste: Simple Hacks to Drastically Reduce your Trash by Shia Su
- The Zero-Waste Chef: Plant-Forward Recipes and Tips for a Sustainable Kitchen and Planet by Anne Marie Bonneau
- Zero Waste Christmas: Crafty Ideas for a Sustainable Christmas by Christine Leech
- Zero waste home: the ultimate guide to simplifying your life by reducing your waste by Bea Johnson
- Zero Waste Kids: Hands-on Projects and Activities to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle
- The zero-waste lifestyle: live well by throwing away less by Amy Korst

Stores

- Eastside Food Co-op, eastsidefood.coop 2551 NE Central Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55418
- Lakewinds Food Co-op, lakewinds.coop Minnetonka
17501 Minnetonka Blvd, Minnetonka, MN 55345
Richfield
6420 Lyndale Ave S, Richfield, MN 55423
- Package Free Shop, packagefreeshop.com
- Tare Market, thetaremarket.com Nokomis
2717 E 38th St, Minneapolis, MN 55406
Northeast
945 Broadway Street NE, Suite 103, Minneapolis, MN 55413
- Seward Community Co-op
Franklin Store
2823 E Franklin Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55406
Friendship Store
317 E 38th St, Minneapolis, MN 55409
- The Zero(ish) Co., zeroishco.com
2309 W. 50th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55410
- Wedge + Linden Hills Community Co-op, tccp.coop
Wedge Lyndale
2105 Lyndale Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55405
Linden Hills Co-op
3815 Sunnyside Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55410

Social media

The following accounts help you connect with a zero waste community both nationally and locally.

- @bipocwho_zerowaste
- @cerowastecindy
- @circulartwincities
- @everyday.environmentalist
- @going.zero.waste
- @mnimizeplastic
- @paredown
- @thezerowasteguide
- @trashtalk.mn: They also offer meetups in the Twin Cities
- @_wastelandrebel_
- @zerowasteadvocatesofmn
- @zerowastechef
- @zerowasted.mn
- @zerowaste_nfld
- @zerowastesaintpaul
- @zwmpls