



## Understanding Plastics

*For anyone who has ever wondered why some things can't be placed in a recycling cart, here's extra information on this complicated material.*

### Plastic. What IS it and how is it used?

The vast majority of plastic is made from petrochemicals - oil or natural gas. (Or, as we like to tell young students in our classes and programs, it's made from [dead dinosaurs](#). Well, that *is* why petroleum is referred to as a fossil fuel.) During refining and processing, chemical additives are added in, including colorants, stabilizers, fillers, reinforcements and plasticizers (which increase a material's flexibility). These additives can have an impact on the chemical and mechanical properties of a plastic and also affect the material's ability to be recycled. All that is just during formation of the base plastic material.

The material will be changed again as it proceeds through the manufacturing of specific products. It may be heated and shaped through blow-molding, or stamped and pressed, or spun as fibers, or other processes unique to a specific product application. Then, adhesives and labels can be affixed, surface treatments may be applied, and other materials can be incorporated into the final product, such as metal caps, paper labeling, or electrical parts. All of these production processes help determine whether or not an item can be recycled later.

The end result of all this is that materials that may look similar, or even be labeled as the same category of plastic, may have enough differences that one item (such as a plastic bottle) *can* be recycled and another (such as a plastic cup) *cannot*.

### How does it all get sorted out?

When you place something in a blue recycling container, it is sent to a *materials recovery facility (MRF)* to be sorted. (Check out this great [video if you want to see a MRF in action!](#)) A combination of human effort and machine technology works to identify and separate the various types of plastics. Sorted recyclable commodities are then baled and sold to the industries that need them. [These buyers, both domestic and international, need good quality, well-sorted recyclable materials.](#) Items that cannot be sorted or sold are disposed. **By placing the right things in your recycling bin, your input can help make this entire process more efficient and economical.**

This recycling system is optimized for identifying, processing and reusing plastic **bottles, tubs and jars**. For some materials, like dark, microwaveable plastics, adequate sorting technology is not yet in place. For still other items, such as disposable cups, reliable markets are not available to buy the material for reuse. This combination of technological processes to sort the materials and industrial buyers to utilize them is what ultimately defines whether or not an item can be placed in your blue bin for recycling.

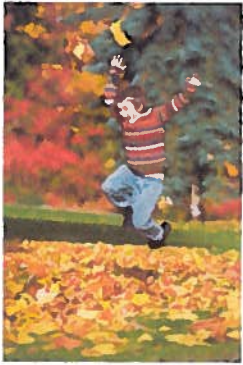
### Here's how you can help!

When considering which bin to place something plastic in, first consider, "Is it a bottle, tub or jar?" Our program accepts items such as soda and water bottles, soap and shampoo bottles, yogurt and margarine tubs, peanut butter or salad dressing jars. Beyond these basic "bottles, tubs and jars", most plastic items are not recyclable in the curbside collection program. This means no cups, no toys, no hinged packaging like produce, takeout or bakery containers, and no items that can get tangled up in the sorting equipment, like trash bags, garden hoses and electrical cords.

**If you're not sure about whether or not an item is recyclable, you can:**

- Check our searchable database at [www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/recycle](http://www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/recycle).
- Download our [mobile app](#).
- Refer to our [accepted items list](#).
- Or, when in doubt, throw it out, in the trash.

If you have still have questions, call our office at 301-600-2960, send email to [recycle@frederickcountymd.gov](mailto:recycle@frederickcountymd.gov) or post comments online at [www.Facebook.com/FrederickRecycles](https://www.Facebook.com/FrederickRecycles)! And, **THANK YOU for recycling!**



## It's Time to Build Your Compost Pile

*Free carbon-rich materials are yours for the taking!*

Households that maintain a backyard compost pile usually have ample access to "green" nitrogen-rich materials throughout the year in the form of kitchen scraps, fruit and vegetable peelings, coffee grounds, grass clippings and garden debris. However, a pile needs an ample amount of dry, carbon-based materials to balance out all that nitrogen, and, sometimes, that can be harder to come by. "Brown", carbon-rich materials include dried leaves and plant clippings, vines, small woody stems, straw, shredded paper and similar items. (For more info, check out our [guide to home composting!](#))

Autumn brings a bounty of "brown" materials as carbon-rich dried leaves fall right at your feet (and on the lawn, and across the driveway, and in the garden, and, well, everywhere). It's time to stock up!

And, if you don't have a compost pile (what?!), this is a great time to make one! By starting now you could have finished compost ready for next year's garden.

To have a steady supply of carbon materials well into next year, collect leaves and garden debris now (such as dead flowering plants, dried vegetable stalks, ornamental grasses, etc.). Gather these materials into piles at the edge of your yard or keep them tidy in burlap sacks or an enclosed space like our [GeoBin composters](#). The more material you can set aside now, the more you'll have on hand when your pile -and your garden- heats up in spring. Fallen leaves are a valuable material that is very easy to incorporate into a compost pile.

Some leaves can be left right under trees and shrubs where they will compost themselves. This helps to reduce the amount of new mulch needed to cover these areas. Many homeowners simply [mow fallen leaves](#), chipping them and letting them build a healthy layer of organic material for their turf. And, of course, you can also mix fallen leaves into your compost pile right away; it's best to chip them up, as smaller materials compost faster, and large clumps of whole leaves can stick in layers that keep air and water from moving throughout a compost pile.

We also offer two [yard waste drop-off sites](#) that will take your leaves if you have more than you can handle. No matter how you manage them, remember to appreciate all those autumn leaves - not only their colorful beauty, but for their important role in nature's recycling system.

Have questions about composting? Give us a call at 301-600-7405 or email your questions to [acreamer@frederickcountymd.gov](mailto:acreamer@frederickcountymd.gov).



## Planning Ahead: Holiday Light Recycling

*Strands of lights can't be placed in a blue bin - but there are other options for recycling them!*

If you decorate for the holidays, you may find some worn-out strands of lights among your supplies. These can't be processed along with regular single-stream recycling, since cords and wires get tangled up in the recycling sorting equipment and can cause damage and endanger workers. However, there are resources to help keep these materials out of the landfill!

**MOM's Organic Market** serves as a drop-off point for holiday lights every December and January. Visit <https://momsorganicmarket.com/recycle-center/> for more information.

**Home Depot** has collected holiday light strands for several years - and sometimes even offers a discount on the purchase of new, energy-efficient LED lights in exchange! Check their website for a program announcement in mid-November. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/newsroom/save-money-energy-upgrading-your-christmas-lights>.

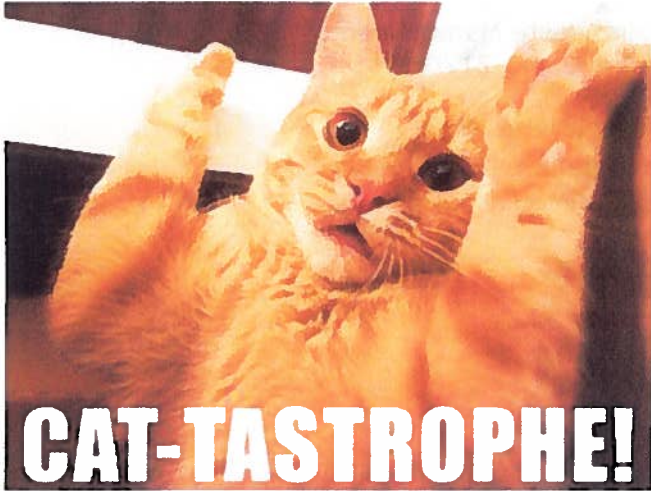


Recycling in Frederick County



Wheels fall off the recycling cart? Lid cracked? Or has the whole cart gone mysteriously missing? We can help! Visit [www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/carts](http://www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/carts) to submit an order for a repair, exchange or replacement. We're not kitten around! Don't waste time -- do it right meow! P.S...Today is International Cat Day. (No, we're not making that up.) So, feel free to share a pic of your feline friend here in the comments. Or your recycle bin full of cat food cans. We'll even send you a free t-shirt if you can show us your cat recycling! 🐾

# THE RECYCLING CART IS BROKEN?!



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Bethany Yates Dallagnello and 27 others

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## Follow Us on Facebook!

This "Recycle More, Waste Less" newsletter provides information about four times a year.

To get weekly tips, local event reminders and fun content like contests and trivia (OK, and sometimes cat photos), join our community conversation on Facebook!

When you follow our page you can post questions, submit images and easily share the items that interest you with your friends and family.

Each "like", comment and share helps spread the word about the value of recycling - and how to do it right!

[www.Facebook.com/FrederickRecycles](http://www.Facebook.com/FrederickRecycles)