

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. To provide assistance and inspiration in setting goals, tracking your progress and taking action, the guide also includes planning worksheets, templates and sample recipes.

Developing low-waste habits is a gradual process. Start with actions that make sense for where you and your family are at today. 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!

The first phase of becoming a zero-waste household is to take a look at what you are taking out to your bin(s) and get everything possible out of your trash can. To help you figure that out, 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 exactly what your household throws out by doing a waste sort. Use the Waste Audit and Waste Sort sheets at the end of the guide to quantify 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.

Conduct a household waste sort

Conducting a waste sort may sound intimidating or bizarre, 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 actually 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 you can choose areas to focus on for improvement.

Start your zero-waste journey by looking into all of your waste containers or doing a full-scale waste sort. This will establish a baseline to measure your progress against. See the waste sort guide at the end of this document 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, and competition throughout the process.

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

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!

Recycle and compost everything you can!

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.

