

WHAT AM I ABLE TO RECYCLE?

Paper Cardboard Dairy and Juice Cartons

Also called "gable-top cartons," these are the non-plastic milk and juice cartons you see in the refrigerated section of the supermarket. Known in the industry as "poly-coated paperboard containers," the cartons are made of about 80% high-quality paper fiber, a renewable resource, and 20% polyethylene, a type of plastic that keeps the paper from getting wet. America consumes enormous quantities of milk and juice, requiring tremendous outlays of energy to produce, ship and landfill the cartons. Only a fraction of these are recycled. Tropicana Products, Dean Foods and select carton manufacturers have launched a program in which residents can recycle these containers in regular recycling bins at no additional charge. This program began in Florida and has been expanded to communities across the country.

After Pick-Up, What Happens? Poly-coated paperboard containers undergo a process known as "hydro-pulping." Bales of containers are first reduced to pulp, which separates the polyethylene from the paper fiber. The fiber is used to make other paper products such as tissue and paper towels. The polyethylene is used in furniture, to generate energy, or reduced even further into paraffin, which "blends" the cartons so the non-paper and paper layers separate. The recovered paper fibers can be recycled into items such as tissue and paper towels. Sometimes dairy and juice cartons are recycled as "mixed paper," a process that does not use hydro-pulping but instead follows the regular paper-making process.

Phone Books

Every year, new phone books and business directories arrive at your door. Are you careful to recycle your old ones? The pages in a phone book are 100% recyclable and are often used to make new phone books. There are enough phone books created each year to measure 106,700 miles when lined up end to end. This means they would circle around the earth about 4.28 times! By recycling just 500 books, we could save between 17 and 31 trees, 7,000 gallons of water, 463 gallons of oil, 587 pounds of air pollution, 3.06 cubic yards of landfill space and 4,077 kilowatt hours of energy according to the American Forest & Paper Association. In many places, you can simply drop the phone book into your recycling bin and leave it curbside for pickup. Call your municipality for more information.

Glass

Most glass bottles and jars produced in the United States now contain at least 27% recycled glass - which also saves on energy to produce glass made from new materials. Some glass cannot be made into other products, or doing so is not economically feasible. If your local recycler doesn't participate in glass recycling, it's due to the market for that glass being very small or non-existent. However, if glass recycling is available, it's important to keep in mind as you recycle that even small amounts of some materials mixed in can contaminate entire loads. Find out more about the types of glass and how they are recycled below.

Clear (Flint) Glass

About 61% of glass containers produced in this country are clear. Clear glass is made of a combination of silica (sand), soda ash, and limestone. Marketing professionals often prefer clear glass containers because they make the product inside visible. However, clear glass may cause some products to degrade because of light exposure. That's why about 39% of the glass produced is colored. Clear glass is sometimes used for beverages. More often, it's used to package solids or thick liquids, such as pasta sauce, that may not be sensitive to light.

Brown (Amber) Glass

About 31% of glass containers produced in this country are brown in color. To produce brown glass, the manufacturer adds nickel, sulfur and carbon to molten glass. The "brown" in the glass cannot be removed. Thus, brown bottles can be used only to make other brown bottles. Brown glass protects the container's contents from direct sunlight, thus preserving freshness and flavor. It is the most common color used for beer bottles.

Green (Emerald) Glass

About 7% of glass containers produced in this country are green in color. To produce green glass, the manufacturer adds iron, chromium or copper to molten glass. Green glass comes in a variety of shades. The "green" cannot be removed. Thus, green bottles can be used only to make other green bottles. Green glass helps keep sunlight and temperature from affecting the contents, which explains why it is often used in the manufacture of wine bottles.

More About Recycling Glass

Some curbside programs and recycling centers take only certain colors of glass. That's because manufacturers who buy the glass have to maintain the integrity of the color when producing new glass.

