

# Things to Keep Out of Your Recycling Bin

## The ins and outs of recycling

BY REBECCA KOFFMAN

You're at home in front of your recycling bin. Maybe the bin is in your driveway, or in the parking lot of your apartment complex. Maybe you're in your bathrobe. Maybe it's raining. And you've got a take-out container. Or some weird packaging you've never seen before. Is it recycling or garbage? Read on for what goes in and what stays out of your home recycling bin.

When deciding which plastics to throw in your curbside bin, "pay attention to shape and size," says Betty Shelley, a recycling expert who has answered calls and emails at Metro's Recycling Information Center.

Shapes to look for? Bottles, jars, buckets and tubs. Remember bathroom products like shampoo and body lotion, as well as garden pots, are also often recyclable at home.

What stays out of your home bin: Plastic bags: "Plastic bags absolutely can't go in," says Shelley. "They get tangled in the machinery at the sorting facility."

Plastic lids are also a no. These tend to be small and thin, and so are easily hidden by paper and cardboard as they make their way along the conveyor belts at sorting facilities. They can then end up in bales of paper or cardboard — making those bales harder to sell, and therefore harder to actually recycle into new paper products.

Plastic clamshells, those containers that salad greens, cherry tomatoes, and deli salads and sandwiches are packed in, along with some other similar plastics, are not recyclable at home. Sorting facilities don't have the machinery to deal with them and the plastic they're made of can be harder to sell to recyclers.

It's confusing though, because a lot of these plastics have a recycling number on them, surrounded by a triangle of arrows.

"Ignore the arrows. Ignore the numbers," says Shelley. The number is an indicator to industry insiders — it tells them what kind of resin is in the plastic and what its properties are but as doesn't mean it's recyclable at the curb.

Everything from junk mail to



Things like household batteries and a range of plastics may fall into the category of what Singh calls "wishful recycling" — things that people want to be recycled, but that actually aren't on the list of what you can recycle at home.

The Metro Recycling Information Center answers questions about whatever you're not sure how to get rid of 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday at 503-234-3000.

Rebecca Kaufman writes for the regional government agency Metro.

Plastic bags are not recyclable at the curb because the bags get tangled in the machinery at the sorting facility.

newspapers to egg cartons (the paper ones) goes in your home recycling bin. You can also recycle milk and juice cartons, as well as aseptic containers that allow soup, broth and soy milk to be stored at room-temperature. These containers are not 100 percent paper, but because the manufacturers of these kinds of cartons have invested in ways to collect and recycle them they're a part of the home recycling system.

What stays out: Frozen and refrigerated food boxes. Keep food boxes that go in the freezer or refrigerator out of your home recycling. Think waffles, popsicles or butter boxes. They may not seem different from cereal or cookie boxes but they are made with a plastic that keeps them from getting soggy when exposed to moisture. Milk, juice and aseptic cartons are layered rather than penetrated with plastic, making the materials easier to separate.

Paper cups also stay out of the bin. Like freezer boxes, "paper" cups are also made with plastic so they don't dissolve into a sodden mass when filled with liquids.

A cost-efficient recycling system depends on making sure recyclables are actually recycled once they leave your bin. So mucking them up with the stuff that doesn't belong there — that either slows the sorting lines like plastic bags do, or makes other recyclables less marketable like lids can — eventually drives up costs for everyone.

When in doubt, keep it out.

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If you require Spanish language or ASL interpretation services, contact Cristela at Legal Aid by May 23rd, 503-471-1137 or Cristela.Delgado-Daniel@lasoregon.org. Si necesita servicios de interpretación en español, póngase en contacto con Cristela en Servicios Legales 23 de mayo, llamando al 503-471-1137 o cristela.delgado-daniel@lasoregon.org.

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