



Half Your Garbage



Group, Corporate or Institutional
Just how much trash do Canadians generate in a lifetime? Well, the shocking truth is the average person in this country will throw away 606 times their bodyweight in garbage. A 68 kilogram adult will leave behind 40,825 kilograms of trash per year!

Canada is an affluent nation that is addicted to junk - far more so than most countries of the world. By the age of six months, the average Canadian has consumed the same amount of resources as the average person in the developing world consumes in a lifetime. It's time for us to get wiser about what we buy, and about what we throw out. Most households could easily cut the amount of garbage they generate in half if they became environmentally friendly shoppers and got more involved in composting and recycling.

Can you cut the amount of garbage you generate in half?

Enviro-Wise Shopping

Buying more of your groceries in the bulk food section will greatly cut down on the amount of wrapping and packaging you need to throw out. In most cases, it will also save you a lot of money. The poly bags that you place the bulk food in are recyclable, and many stores have containers set up at the entrance where you can leave this recyclable material on your next shopping trip. Once you get home, you can transfer food into sealable, reusable plastic containers that help to keep it fresh. Use canvas bags or plastic bins to carry your groceries out of the store, and this will help to further cut back on the waste.



Paper napkins are another example of a disposable product that is greatly overused. When we have a spill to clean up on the table or kitchen counter, many of us automatically reach for a disposable paper towel - but a damp dishcloth would do the job just as well.

Disposable Products

What do we do when we have family and friends coming over for a barbecue? Break out the paper plates, the disposable cups and cutlery and just throw everything in the garbage when the party's done. Millions of tons of garbage are generated across Canada each year so that we can save a few minutes cleaning up after the festivities are over.

Obviously, we don't want to use the best China in the backyard or out at the cabin - but there are plenty of safe and practical alternatives. Why not purchase sturdy plastic plates, cutlery and cups. You can reuse them time and time again. Not only is this an environmentally friendly option, it can also save you a lot of money over the long run.



Travel Mugs

Every day, millions of Canadians stop off at their nearest coffee shop for their morning java - and millions more containers end up in landfill sites. A lot of customers will ask for double cups if their coffee is too hot to handle, and this effectively doubles the amount of waste being generated. It is a much better idea to use travel mugs.

Most coffee shops are only too happy to fill up a travel mug since it allows them to save on the cost of cups. Travel mugs are usually thermally insulated, so it is a lot safer to drive with them in your car.

Hazardous Materials

When it's time for spring cleaning, many people take half empty paint cans, old motor oil, and outdated pesticides and herbicides, and simply dump them all in the garbage. This material ends up contributing to the "toxic stew" in landfill sites, and it should be taken to an eco-station instead. Staff there will see to it that the paint is reused, the oil is recycled, and other toxic wastes are disposed of in a manner that doesn't harm the environment.

Computers, televisions and other electronic items also tend to get thrown into the garbage when they stop working, and this is a definite no-no from an environmental standpoint. Printed circuit boards contain heavy metals such as antimony, silver, chromium, zinc, lead, tin and copper. There is also a lot of lead oxide in the cathode ray tubes of computers and televisions. This lead oxide is soluble, meaning that it can be dissolved in water. If it manages to leak out of the

landfill site, it can pose a serious hazard to the water table. In 2005, it was estimated that 3000 tonnes of lead oxide, as well as 4 tonnes of cadmium and 1 tonne of mercury - ended up in Canadian landfill sites because of computers and electronic items thrown in the garbage.



It's much more sensible to take this material to a recycling depot or an eco-station. Eco stations accept these items free of charge, and see to it that all of the material is reused and disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner.

Composting

About 30% of the garbage that is typically sent to landfill sites consists of organic waste, so composting this material greatly reduces the amount of waste being thrown out. Keep a small plastic container in your kitchen and fill it up with kitchen scraps and organic waste. You'll want to use a container with a sealable lid to control odours. Once the container is full, transfer it to a composting bin. The types of scraps that can be composted include potato peels, lettuce, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggs shells and cobs of corn. Don't throw any meat or dairy products in your compost, though, because they can't be broken down and pose a health hazard.

Composting at Home

Most yard wastes can be composted, including:

- leaves;
- vines;
- plant stalks;
- twigs;
- branches;
- grass clippings (see grasscycling); and
- weeds (without weed seeds).

Food waste can be composted, like:

- fruit scraps;
- vegetable scraps;
- coffee grounds; and
- eggshells.

These materials can be composted as well:

- feathers;
- straw; and
- rabbit and hamster manure (but not dog and cat waste).

These materials should only be composted in limited amounts:

- wood ashes (a source of lime);
- sawdust (requires extra nitrogen - add more food scraps);
- plants treated with herbicides (the chemicals need time for thorough decomposition); and
- shredded non-recyclable paper.

Leaves, grass clippings and garden waste can also be added to a compost pile. Composting is a natural process which converts organic material such as food scraps and organic waste into compost that can be used as soil in your garden. Various micro-organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, are responsible for breaking down the organic material. Compost piles work best when these micro-organisms have both carbon (from dry leaves and dry grass) and nitrogen (found in kitchen scraps) - so a compost pile that mixes kitchen and yard waste is ideal.

Backyard Composting: Step by Step

1. **Fill it.**
Fill a bin with the proper organic materials. Always cover food scraps with leaves.
2. **Turn it.**
Composting needs food, air and water (keep it as wet as a wrung sponge). If you want compost quickly, turn it about once a week. If you don't turn it the process will take longer.
3. **Use it.**
Use compost as mulch or soil enricher. To make potting soil, add one part sand to two parts compost.



Bonus: Add red wiggler worms. They help to aerate the pile and make a richer compost.

RECYCLING FACT: Instead of composting grass clippings in a bin, try grasscycling. Grasscycling is leaving clippings on the lawn after mowing. It makes lawns greener and healthier. When grass clippings are allowed to decompose on the lawn, nutrients are recycled and beneficial organic matter is added to the soil.



Refundable and Recyclable

It's estimated that approximately 1/3 of refundable containers end up in landfill sites. Some people feel that they don't have the time to bring their bottles into the depot, so they just throw them in the garbage. But there are plenty of worthwhile agencies - such as Bottles for Health or the Boy Scouts - that are willing to come right to your home to pick up these refundable containers.

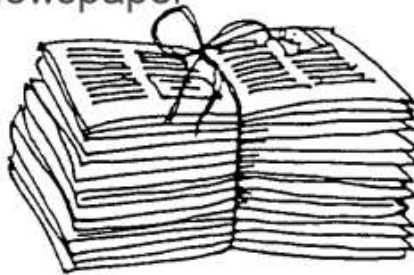
People often don't know which containers are refundable. For example, large tin cans that contained tomato juice or small 250ml tetra-pack containers often get thrown away because homeowners don't realize they have a deposit value. Check out the graphics on the next page to get a better idea of what material can be brought in for a refund. Throwing these items out is like throwing away money!

Even if items don't have a refund value, it still makes good environmental sense to recycle them. Recycling greatly reduces the amount of reusable material that is sent to landfill sites. The items you can place in your blue bag or blue bin include:



Cardboard/Boxboard

Newspaper



Magazines



Empty
Aerosol
Cans



Glass Jars
Bottles

Plastic Bags
Containers

