

The Irish Waste Management Association (IWMA) answers common questions on Recycling Household Waste. (revised 2023)

What do you mean by dry recyclables and what bin do I put them in?

Dry recyclables include paper and packaging that most household consumers generate by virtue of the food / goods they buy and use and bring into their houses every day. It includes metals, plastics and paper items. These go into your recycling bin, which can be different colours in different parts of the country.

The list of dry recyclables accepted by waste collection operators in Ireland has been approved by the local authorities in each county and comprises the following materials:



Since clothes and shoes are recyclable can I put them in my recycling bin?

While they are recyclable and many can be reused, they should not be placed in any of your household bins, drop them off at a bring centre / clothes bank or the local charity shop. Household waste materials recycling facilities are not geared up to segregate or recycle these items.

Can I put plastic wrapping and shrink wrap from vegetables in my recycling bin?

Yes, so long as it is clean and dry.

Can I put glass in my Recycling Bin?

No, this was allowed in the past in some areas but as it frequently breaks into smaller shards it then contaminates paper and plastic in the bin making it harder to recycle these other materials. Please collect it separately and drop it off at the local glass bank or Civic Amenity site for recycling.

What about pizza boxes with some residues?

If the box is free of food waste and only a small amount of grease on the box it can be put in the recycling bin with other paper and cardboard. But if it is heavily soiled put it in the organics / composting bin. Make sure not to drop plastic or foil into the organics bin.

Can I put Aluminium foil and trays in the recycling bin?

Yes, if it is clean and drip-dry. If it is heavily soiled with food / grease put it in the residual waste bin.

Can I put empty crisp / sweet wrappers etc in my recycling bin?

Yes, so long as it is clean and dry.

What about torn or used clean plastic bags – clear and various colours?

Yes, so long as it is clean and dry.

What do I do with polystyrene packaging?

Don't put this in your dry recyclables bin. You can place it in your residual waste bin or, if you have a lot, many Civic Amenity sites have a collection unit on site where you can drop it off at no charge.

What do I do with old plastic toys?

If they are in good condition, your local charity shop may accept them but otherwise, discard in the residual waste bin.

What do I do with electrical / battery items or bulbs or old batteries?

All electrical retailers will take these back these items free of charge from householders, as will civic amenity sites. Do not put them into any of your household bins.

What about partially used or old medicines or veterinarian products?

These are deemed as hazardous waste in Ireland and should be brought to your civic amenity site for proper disposal. Do not place in the residual bin. In some areas your local pharmacy may take it back for disposal. Unfortunately, in some cases sharp medical waste such as needles end up on the picking line putting staff at risk of contracting infectious diseases.

What about empty packaging from Pharmaceutical products?

Please do not place empty blister packs from tablets or pharmaceutical products in your recycling bin as they can be mistaken for hazardous pharmaceutical waste and cause a batch of material to be rejected by a re-processor. So just drop these items in the residual waste bin. But it is OK to drop cleaned, empty glass medicine bottles into glass banks.

What about empty aerosol cans?

Aerosol cans are dangerous in recycling facilities as they can cause minor explosions or fires, so please do not place these in your recycling bin. Try to buy alternatives such as pump action or roller action products, as aerosols have a much greater environmental impact. Some civic amenity sites will take waste aerosol cans. If that option is not available to you locally, you should dispose of them in your residual waste bin.

I was considering putting my recyclables in a bag in the kitchen and then dropping them into my recycling bin, is this OK?

While most recycling centres have bag opening devices, it slows down the process very considerably and it is much better if you drop the items loosely into the recycling bin. You can use a reusable bag to transfer the items between the kitchen and the bin.

Can I put various items into each other before placing in the recycling bin, e.g. stuff bottles into cardboard boxes?

No. This makes it difficult to separate them for recycling at the processing centres. Just drop them loose into the recycling bin.

I have too much material for collection every 2 weeks, what can I do?

Your waste provider can provide you with a second bin at minimal charge or you can compact the bin lightly to get more material in. In particular squash all items before placing in the bin i.e boxes or milk cartons so that they take up less space.

Why do items have to be clean and dry?

Unlike other countries, in Ireland we allow householders to place all their recyclables in the recycling bin together. If wet items are placed in the bin they will cause any paper in the bin to get wet and this impacts the ability to recycle it. If it is heavily contaminated with food it will attract rats and vermin to your bin and to the recycling centre and will cause smells – both in your garden and while in transit to the re-processor. In addition it may make the whole batch of material unfit to reprocess.

How dry do items need to be?

Drip dry will do fine. It's just to make sure you don't cause the paper in your recycling bin to become wet and soggy.

Tetra Packs are recyclable so why not Coffee cups?

Tetra packs are all made to the same format and Tetra Pak has come up with a methodology to recycle packaging made from their products. Coffee cups do not conform to a standard format and it's a mixture of plastic and cardboard that at the moment we cannot recycle. Also, frequently people place them in the recycling bin still partially full of coffee or tea that again ruins the paper and cardboard in the bin.

What happens with the contents of my Recycling Bin?

The bin truck weighs your bin and then tips the contents into the back of the truck where it is compacted with other collected mixed recyclable material. When the truck is full it returns to the depot or the recycling centre where the bin lorry empties the mixed contents onto the reception hall floor and it is inspected to check if it is fit to process. If it is, then it is loaded (using a loading shovel) into large containers that feed the separation machines. The separation unit, called a MRF (Material Recycling facility) has a number of processes that separate out each type of material collected into its individual 'streams' e.g. aluminium cans/trays, steel cans, paper and cardboard and the various types of plastics.

Most of the processes are automated but many operators also operate a picking line. This is where the materials collected are placed on a conveyor belt and people hand pick contaminated materials off the conveyor belt. It is very important that materials sent to re-processors are not contaminated as this will ruin the end products and may render the materials useless for recycling. Unfortunately, there is

no benefit to the environment when this happens as the load will be sent for disposal rather than being recycled.

The picking line is difficult and unpleasant job, so please don't put non-recyclable material in your recycling bin.

Once the materials have been separated into individual 'streams' they are then baled into large cubed bales (about 1 tonne each). These are stacked in a warehouse until a full shipment is ready, (typically 22 tonnes). The bales are then loaded into shipping containers for transfer to a re-processor that specialises in recycling each type of material:

- paper and cardboard goes to a paper mill that makes new paper;
- plastic packaging recycled back into plastic flake that is reused to make a wide variety of new plastic products,
- aluminium cans are sent to aluminium smelters to make new Aluminium.

Diverting these items from landfill into recycling is good for the environment and will benefit future generations as we consider our planet more carefully.

What's a brown bin and where can I get one?

In addition to segregating dry recyclables, it is now good practice to segregate food and organic waste from general household waste and place it in a another bin which is usually Brown in colour or called an 'Organics' bin. This bin costs less than your residual waste bin to operate so it's a good way to save some money while helping to meet recycling targets. Food and other biodegradable waste placed in this bin is sent for composting or anaerobic digestion. In the case of the latter it produces energy while both processes also generate good quality compost that can be reused on land and gardens.

It is important not to contaminate this bin with other material that is non-compostable e.g. plastic, metal, rubble etc. Food waste can be placed in compostable bags in your kitchen and these can be put in the brown, but make sure that the bags are actually compostable and not just degradable or biodegradable. Some degradable plastics break down into smaller plastic parts which themselves become a problem in the environment. Compostable bags are made from vegetable matter such as maize, wheat, corn and/or potato starch, rather than from plastic polymers, so read the label carefully before buying these bags.

Some waste collectors provide small brown bins (c.35 litres) that can only take food waste, whilst others provide larger bins (120l or 240l) that can take both food waste and garden waste such as grass and hedge clippings.

As all urban areas are now being serviced, why not call your local waste contractor to see if you can get one. Your waste collector is obliged to provide you with a brown bin in urban areas. That obligation will extend to all areas in 2024.

Remember, by recycling the permitted items you are helping to protect the environment and saving money!