

**Start Today And Recycle
for PORTAGE**



Composting: How Long Until It's Gone?

Solutions: What Can We Do to Help?

The Three Rs: What Does the City of Portage Offer?

COMPOSTING: HOW LONG UNTIL IT'S GONE?

Cigarette butts: 18 months to 10 years

Cigarette butts just might be the most common litter on planet Earth. About 5.5 trillion cigarettes are consumed every year, and a huge percentage of them wind up flicked out of car windows or dropped on the street where they wash into storm drains and eventually into the ocean or other waterways. Cigarette filters contain slowly degrading plastic cellulose acetate, and butts are believed to represent a third of all litter in America; they are the most common litter found on America's beaches.

Monofilament fishing line: 600 years

According to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, monofilament fishing lines are especially hazardous because they ensnare and trap marine animals and other wildlife during their long, slow road to decomposition. Although monofilament fishing lines can be partially recovered and reused, the process for doing so isn't widely used.

Nylon fishing nets: 40 years

Nylon fishing nets can be reused, but they can't be fully recycled. When they're lost or intentionally cut, they present a major hazard to marine animals and other wildlife that become entangled in them in the water or on the shores.

Plastic bags: 10-1,000 years

Consumers in recent years have become more aware of the environmental hazard posed by plastic bags, but plastic bags are still one of the most common pollutants. Although they can break down in as little as a decade, the commonly discarded thin plastic bags can endure for as long as 1,000 years.

Foamed plastic cups: 50 years

Foamed plastic cups decompose faster than most plastic waste. Even so, these plastic cups can be expected to endure for half a century before they finally break down and rejoin nature.

Straws: 200 years

Since they are essentially unnecessary (for most people) and almost never make it into the recycling bin, plastic straws have become a top target for environmentalists hoping to reduce plastic waste. Americans use millions of straws a day, which can remain on the earth for two centuries after being tossed in the garbage.

Wet wipes: 100 years

Wet wipes are popular for quickly removing makeup, changing babies' diapers, and making house cleaning a snap. The problem is they contain polyester-based plastic that's virtually indestructible; they take a century to break down after they're tossed in the garbage or flushed down the toilet.

6-pack holders: 450 years

Even when the circles on plastic six-pack holders are cut, they still pose a major threat to wildlife, as they often wind up in the ocean. The thin plastic can holders take nearly half a millennium to break down.

Tin: 50 years

Tin can take half a century to break down in a landfill, according to Electronics Recyclers International. Tin is used to make food cans, but it's also a common component of computers and other electronics.

Tires: 2,000 years

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources estimates that tires can take two millennia to revert back to nature. They're also laden with oils, heavy metals like lead, and other pollutants that contaminate the environment as they break down. About 242 million tires are discarded every year in the U.S. alone, and only 7% are recycled.

Nylon fabric: 30-40 years

Nylon fabric is often used for sports equipment like jerseys and mesh shorts, but it's also found in arts and crafts supplies. Frequently trashed, the material takes decades to decompose.

Plastic bottles: 450 years

Pollution from plastic bottles is a global problem, but in the United States alone more than 60 million bottles are thrown away instead of being recycled every single day. Despite being one of the easiest items to recycle, they often wind up in streets, parks, and other public spaces, landfills, incinerators, and the ocean. Plastic bottles take hundreds of years to decompose.

Cotton T-shirts: 6 months

T-shirts are one of the most common items in the so-called “fashion waste” category of pollution, which accumulates when people throw old clothes away instead of donating them, swapping them, or recycling them. The common cotton T-shirt can decompose in six months.

Wool socks: 1-5 years

Like t-shirts, old wool socks are often presumed to be un-donatable and are therefore tossed in the garbage. Unlike cotton T-shirts, they linger in landfills for up to five years.

Synthetic fabric: over 100 years

Unlike naturally occurring wool and cotton, synthetic fabrics like lycra and polyester can take centuries to break down. The vast majority of fashion waste can be donated or repurposed into things like dog beds or cleaning rags instead of being thrown in the garbage.

Aluminum cans: 80-100 years

Aluminum cans only start to break down after 80 to 100 years and will only fully decompose after several centuries. Unlike many other materials, aluminum can be recycled an unlimited number of times, making it one of the most critical and widely repurposed recyclables.

Vegetables: 5 days to 1 month

Vegetable matter breaks down quickly, and in some cases, in less than a week. This, along with the excellent nutrient content contained within decaying vegetable matter, makes veggie scraps perfect for composting.

Orange peels: 6 months

Fruits can take longer than vegetables to break down, particularly those that are highly acidic. Self-contained and easy to eat on the go, oranges account for more scrap waste than most fruits, and they also take longer to decompose.

Banana peels: up to 6 months

Billions of bananas are consumed every year, and like oranges, their peels don't decompose for several months. Also, like oranges, banana peels are perfect for composting or tossing in the garden.

Hairspray bottles: 200-500 years

Aerosol bottles like the kind that contain hairspray are a common sight in landfills across the world. A single one can remain intact for the entire duration of the Roman Empire before it decomposes.

Rope: 3-14 months

Common rope can take a little more than a year or a single season to decompose, depending on the materials used to make it. Natural materials like hemp decompose faster than synthetic materials like the kind used to produce climbing rope.

Sanitary pads and tampons: over 25 years

About 7 billion tampons and 12 billion sanitary pads are thrown away every year in the United States alone, most of which contain plastic in the lining or the applicator. The cotton portion decomposes fairly quickly, but the low-density polyethylene plastic takes decades to break down. Never flush plastic applicators, as they can end up in the ocean.

Cotton gloves: 3 months

Common cotton gloves can break down in as little as three months. However, that rate is contingent on the gloves being 100% cotton. The biodegradation rate increases dramatically with the inclusion of synthetics like those used for waterproofing and insulation.

Latex gloves: several months to several years

Latex gloves break down fairly quickly, provided they're made from natural latex rubber. Like all synthetic rubber, synthesized latex can take years, decades, or longer to decompose.

Thread: 3-4 months

From furniture to clothing and car interiors to suitcases, threads are everywhere including in the world's landfills. The thread is thin and light, but it piles up fast; it also decomposes relatively quickly.

Paper waste: 2-6 weeks

Paper waste takes only about a month—or a few weeks, give or take—to break down in landfills, but the problem is volume and quantity. Even though it's one of the most commonly recycled materials, paper waste takes up more space in landfills than any other product.

Iron: several years

All metal breaks down differently, but iron oxidizes at a fairly rapid rate. People know oxidation as rust—the brown, flaky stuff that's often mistakenly blamed for tetanus infections. Over the course of several years, iron will oxidize completely, particularly in coastal areas that are damp and coated with saltwater residue.

Food waste: several months to several years

Americans waste 40% of all the food they purchase every year—a full 35 million tons worth \$165 billion. Depending on how it's disposed, and what it contains, food waste can break down in a few months or remain in a state of partial preservation for years.

Shoes: 25-40 years

Leather shoes take a quarter-century or more to decompose. Like virtually all wearable leather products, shoes contain chemicals, dyes, and additives that can leach into the water and soil as the leather breaks down.

Rubber boot soles: 50-80 years

Unlike the shoe itself, rubber soles, particularly those fixed to the bottom of heavy boots, can take more than half a century to decompose. Except for a few environmentally conscious brands, virtually all shoe companies use slow-decaying synthetic rubber to make boot soles.

Cardboard: 2 months

Aside from recycling, cardboard can be composted, used as garden mulch, or repurposed creatively as craft material or pet bedding. It breaks down fairly quickly when it's exposed, but tightly packed cardboard can endure for years.

Train tickets: 2 weeks

Many paper train tickets are made from a coated material that contains more than just paper. Countless millions of train tickets are printed every year, and virtually all of them are thrown away. People can contribute to a cleaner planet by hanging onto their tickets and recycling them at home.

Canvas: 1 year

Highly durable and versatile, a plain-woven canvas is used to make everything from painting surfaces and handbags to clothing and sails. Assuming it's not treated with chemicals, a canvas will break down in about a year, but heavy canvas decomposes slower than light canvas.

Paper towels: 2-4 weeks

In the U.S. alone, more than 13 billion pounds of paper towels are disposed of every year. Around 51,000 trees would be needed to replace the number of paper towels Americans burn through every single day. Switching to reusable cloth wipes will help lower that statistic.

Waxed milk cartons: 3 months

Many recycling plants don't accept paper/plastic hybrid cartons, resulting in millions of tons of packaging waste being dumped in landfills every year. Waxed cartons, used to

hold liquids like milk, have a lower packaging-to-product ratio, so they decompose quicker than their non-waxed counterparts.

Non-waxed cartons: 5 years

Like their waxed counterparts, non-waxed cartons often wind up on the trash heap because consumers believe—correctly or incorrectly, depending on the municipality—that they can't be recycled. Since they require more materials to produce, non-waxed cartons can linger for five years before they decompose.

Disposable diapers: 500 years

For obvious reasons, disposable diapers can't be recycled and the average baby goes through up to 10,000 of them before being potty trained. The #3 most common consumer item found in landfills, disposable diapers represent 30% of all non-biodegradable waste.

Rubber bands: up to 1 year

Once thrown away, the sulfur in rubber bands begins to decay, and the rubber bands themselves will begin to break down. They'll generally be gone in a year, depending on the composition of the rubber, but rubber bands that are stretched break down much faster than those that are not.

Painted boards: 13 years

Painted boards, like the kind that get thrown away to replace a section of fence, can take more than a dozen years to decompose. The paint, however, can degrade much slower, leaching hazardous toxins into the environment.

Lumber: 10-15 years

Lumber is heavy and solid and can take more than a decade to break down. Some lumber, like the kind that is used for outdoor applications, is treated with chemicals, which can slow the process of decay and bleed chemicals into the earth.

Plywood: 1-3 years

Plywood breaks down much faster than solid lumber, but it's not a completely natural process. Plywood contains glue that can decompose at a much slower rate than the wood plies it bonds together.

Batteries: 100 years

Common household alkaline batteries are safe to throw away. However, rechargeable batteries, car batteries, and other industrial types must be disposed of, according to federal guidelines.

Ink cartridges: 450-1,000 years

The ink cartridges from printers are a double-edged sword. Not only do they take centuries to decompose, but they also leak toxic chemicals as they break down. Most recycling plants won't accept them, but major office-supply stores encourage customers to bring the empty ones back for proper disposal.

Leather: 50 years

Leather comes from animal hides, but it is not a natural product. The tanning process involves treating the hides with a soup of chemicals, particularly if the leather was designed to be water-resistant. That means leather leaches chemicals and other toxins into the earth as it breaks down over half a century.

Plastic bottle caps: 10-500 years

Bottle caps previously had to be separated from plastic bottles before they could be recycled, as caps and bottles are made from two different types of plastic. However, advancements in the industry mean that bottle caps can now be kept on for recycling. Bottle caps are made from high-density polyethylene and polypropylene, both of which can now be recycled.

Apple cores: 2 months

Apple cores don't take quite as long as banana peels and oranges to decompose. However, they remain intact longer than fruits and vegetables that are denser and have higher water content. Once tossed into the garbage, an apple core takes about eight weeks to biodegrade.

K-Cups / Coffee Pods: up to 500 years

According to some estimates, it can take up to 500 years to decompose in landfills, where they leach chemicals into land and water.

Polyurethane seat cushions: 1,000 years

Polyurethane cushions, commonly found in car seats and home furniture, are made by injecting a foam mixture into molds. Once they hit the garbage heap, however, they remain as is for centuries.

Glass: over 1 million years

Since it breaks so easily, people tend to think of glass as fragile, but it's actually one of the most durable materials on Earth, at least in terms of decomposition. Relics from the earliest days of glass-making in 2000 B.C. Egypt still exist, and experts theorize that a glass bottle would take 1 million years or more to fully decompose on its own.

Aluminum foil: never

Americans throw away enough aluminum foil every year to build a fleet of aircraft, and that's a sad statistic for two reasons. First, aluminum foil is easily and completely

recyclable. Secondly, these thin, foldable, metallic sheets never break down all the way to full decomposition.

Styrofoam: never

In the world of landfill-clogging waste from America's throwaway culture, there is Styrofoam and there's everything else. More than 3 million tons of polystyrene products are produced in the U.S. every year, the vast majority of which are one-and-done, single-use throwaway products. Styrofoam is efficient and inexpensive, but making it requires the use of fossil fuels and dangerous chemicals. Virtually no communities allow it to be included in recycling. It is not biodegradable, so it never decomposes. Americans throw away 25 billion Styrofoam coffee cups alone every single year—enough to circle the earth 436 times.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

1. Use a reusable bottle/cup for beverages on-the-go

You might already have a reusable water bottle, but do you use it all the time?

You can put that reusable bottle to use, save money and reduce waste. By taking your own water with you, you'll also reduce your chances of purchasing more

expensive beverages on the go. This will eliminate the one-time use containers they come in. While most cans and bottles can be recycled, they require a lot of energy to be produced, shipped to the bottling facility and then to the store for purchase.

2. Use reusable grocery bags, and not just for groceries

Just like a reusable water bottle, you may already have a reusable grocery bag, though it's often forgotten at home. Try writing BAGS on the top of your grocery list to help you remember or keep them in the back seat where they aren't as easy to forget. Some grocery stores will provide a 5 cent per bag refund, so you'll save a few cents while reducing your usage of one-time-use plastic bags.

3. Purchase wisely and recycle

You can reduce the amount of waste you produce by purchasing products that come with less packaging and/or come in packaging that can be recycled. Not all plastics are recyclable, so check labels before you buy. Learn more about recycling programs in your area for specifics.

4. Compost it!

Did you know as much as 25% of the items in your trash could potentially be removed from the waste stream and composted in your backyard? Your fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, grass clippings and leaves can all be composted. While composting requires more effort than the previously mentioned lifestyle changes, it will provide you with a beneficial return on your investment of time and effort. Depending on the conditions, you may have compost in 3 to 12 months to use in your garden. You'll save on fertilizers and if you grow your own vegetables, you'll likely see improved yields. The organic matter will also act as a sponge to absorb more water, meaning you might not need to water your plants as much, saving you money and time.

5. Avoid single-use food and drink containers and utensils

Whenever possible, try to avoid single-use coffee cups, disposable utensils, straws, and napkins. Some businesses will even give you a discount on your coffee for bringing your own mug. Keep a set of silverware at work along with a plate, bowl, and cup that you can wash and reuse. Skip the plastic straw altogether or buy reusable metal ones instead. Remember, a lot of these items are made from plastic, had to be delivered by a truck and will end up in a landfill once we have used them one time. Anything we can do to reduce our use of these products can make a big impact.

6. Buy secondhand items and donate used goods

Before you go buy something new, consider buying it used, which can also save you lots of money. That can mean buying secondhand clothes, used furniture and repurposed construction materials at Habitat for Humanity's ReStore or searching secondhand for a deal on a bicycle. By purchasing secondhand items you'll be supporting local charities in addition to saving items from ending up in the dump.

7. Shop local farmers markets and buy in bulk to reduce packaging

Shopping at your local farmers market is a win-win. You'll be supporting local farmers while also getting fresher ingredients than you might find in the big-box grocery store. Food produced locally doesn't have to be shipped as far or refrigerated in transit. Local farmers often rely on less packaging, and many are happy to have you return last week's berry basket or egg carton for use next week. You can also majorly reduce packaging waste by shopping at stores that sell food in bulk, but you'll need to come prepared with your own containers.

8. Curb your use of paper: mail, receipts, magazines

In today's digital world, most companies offer bills by email, and some even offer incentives to do so. More stores are offering e-receipts, too, which are great because they're harder to lose if you need to make a return. Consider digital subscriptions for your favorite magazines that you can read on your tablet or computer. Digital subscriptions are often a little cheaper than the hard-copy version, as well.

There are numerous companies that allow you opt out of their marketing mailings. If you get an unwanted weekly packet of grocery store circulars in your mailbox, talk to your mail carrier and they will stop delivering it.

9. Use a zero-waste box : Recycle the Unrecyclable

Zero Waste Boxes are an easy-to-use solution to recycle items that typically aren't accepted by local recycling services. The cost of a Zero Waste Box reflects the cost of sorting, cleaning processing, and recycling the collected waste, box, and line, production of the box, transportation to you, and then back to the recycling facility.

Companies such as TerraCycle offer a Zero Waste Box for items such as coffee capsules, toys, beauty empties, PPE, and more. When the box is full, you seal it and ship it back.

Did you know that the City of Portage offers various resources to assist with the three Rs: Reduce, Recycle and Reuse?

1. Charging stations are available at Portage City Hall and Portage Zhang Senior Center.
2. Curbside Recycling Program: the Single-Stream Recycling Program allows residents to mix all acceptable recyclables in one cart - no sorting!
3. Drop-off Recycling: Portage residents may utilize the Best Way Disposal drop-off facility for a fee of \$5.00 per cubic yard.



4. The City of Portage also participates in the Kalamazoo County Government Household Hazardous Waste Program. Portage residents may drop off household hazardous material without incurring additional fees.



5. Recycle Monofilament Fishing Line at Lakeview Park, 9345 Portage Road. If left out in the environment, fishing line can tangle or be ingested by wildlife, endanger swimmers, or become wrapped around boat propellers, and can last up to 600 years in freshwater so pick up discarded fishing line and recycle it by dropping it off at Lakeview Park.



6. Red Med Box - located in the Portage Department of Public Safety lobby. Using a Red Med Box to safely dispose of medication protects the environment from contaminants and our community from medication abuse and addiction. So how can we safely and securely dispose of unwanted, expired meds? Collect your medications, keep them in the original packaging, mark out the patient's name, and drop the medication in the secure drop box.

