



Create a Home Recycling Center

Learning the local regulations for what and how to recycle is a good way to prepare for recycling. But *where* in your home are you going to find space for storing recyclable items? You don't need an extravagant recycling center. Instead, follow these three steps to create a recycling center in your home.

Step 1: Locate your center

It's easier to keep the recycling habit if you make recycling as convenient as possible. Locate your center so you can make recycling part of your daily routine. If possible, choose a spot in or near the kitchen (where most of the solid waste is generated). It's good if this spot also is convenient for hauling away items for disposal—whether loading your car for a trip to the recycling center or carrying items to the street for curbside pickup.

If you live a long distance from a recycling center, you may want to create both short-term storage inside your home, and long-term storage in a garage or outdoor storage shed. Study your situation to find some space for your recycling center.

Use your imagination. A storage unit in the family room, a corner of the laundry room, or a closet could become a recycling center. You could locate your recycling center in the:

- **Kitchen.** Empty an existing cabinet or drawer before building something new. Slide-out storage provides convenient access.
- **Hallway.** The path between kitchen and garage is a convenient location if it's wide enough to hold storage containers.

- **Basement.** Although it's not as convenient as a main floor location, the basement may have more storage space available. You may be able to make a trash chute from kitchen to basement to make dumping easier, but you would need to sort items later. Handle glass separately to prevent breakage.

- **Garage.** It's a convenient location to remind you to haul things to the recycling center, and is ideal for larger storage containers such as garbage cans, barrels, or boxes.

Step 2: Select storage containers

The number and size of storage containers you'll need depends on the number of categories into which you must sort solid waste, and how often you'll be making trips to the recycling center. Some recycling programs allow various wastes to be commingled; others require wastes to be sorted. Check local recycling requirements to decide how complicated a storage system you're going to need. If you're in doubt about who to contact for local regulations, call your county extension office or the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Select containers to fit the size of your storage space, whether drawers, cupboards, shelves, or the floor. Decide how much you're willing to lift. Large containers may be too heavy when full. Small ones may not hold enough to be useful.

Commercially available "recycling centers" can be expensive and may not adapt to your needs. In the true spirit of recycling, try to use existing containers, rather than buying or building new ones.

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- Use paper bags on shelves, in deep drawers, or stand them on the floor. A standard grocery bag is just the right size to hold newspapers.
- Ask local stores for cardboard boxes. Line with old plastic bags to keep the cardboard dry.
- Obtain moving cartons (boxes or barrels used for moving household goods).
- Get fiberboard barrels from bakeries or milk-processing plants.
- Hang a laundry bag on a hook and fill it with soft drink cans or plastic milk jugs. The bag will be easy to carry when full.
- Use old plastic bags for collecting recyclables.
- Coffee cans are convenient for holding small, plastic lids.
- A piece of furniture, such as a buffet or window seat, could become a recycling center.
- A basket, crock, or antique boiler could hold newspapers in the family room.
- A table or rolling cart in the basement or laundry room could be used for sorting recyclables.
- Laundry baskets or tubs, wooden fruit baskets, or old kitchen cabinets could have new life as recycling storage units.
- Color code, label or put pictures on containers, so small children can help sort recyclables. Show them how to separate plastics by using the numbers on the bottoms of the containers.
- Post special instructions in or near the storage area (such as a list of items that can be recycled, or special handling instructions).
- Reduce the volume of tin cans. Remove paper labels, rinse, drip-dry in a dish drainer, cut off both ends, then step on them to mash them flat.
- Have necessary supplies at hand such as twine for bundling newspapers (check local regulations). Use step-top cans that allow hands-free disposal.
- Arrange storage containers at a convenient height for sorting recyclables, perhaps placing them on a table or bench. Put containers on carts or dollies to make moving easier.
- If containers will be “on display,” find ways to make them attractive. Use old paint or wallpaper to match the room decor. Hide open-topped containers behind folding doors, blinds, roller shades, or curtains.
- Keep storage areas free of insects and odors. Take materials to the recycling center frequently, or move them to a long-term storage area outside. Find a safe place for storing hazardous wastes until the items can be taken to a community clean-up day. (Contact your county extension office for more information about hazardous wastes.)

Step 3: Make recycling easier

Make recycling a family affair. It's easier to get people involved if they know what they're supposed to do. Here's how to help.

- Have a practice session for everyone in the family. Decide who will be responsible for what recycling jobs.

- Make regular trips to the redemption center a part of your shopping routine.

- Provide incentives. The person who recycles the soft drink cans gets to keep the refund from the redemption center.

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