FUN FACT
The No. 1 recycler of plastic bags? Trex Composite Decking. Find your drop-off: trex.com/recycling.

RECYCLING SIMPLIFIED

Melanie Mannarino, author of *The (Almost) Zero Waste Guide*, tracked down some of the most common curbside conundrums so you can raise your recycling game.

Most of us think we know how to recycle, but our bins say otherwise. In the U.S., just 32% of items that can be recycled end up in the proper bin. The EPA's goal is 50% by 2030. Here's info to help us get there.

Plastic bottles

Anything that has a neck for a screw-on lid is likely recyclable, says Mitch Hedlund, executive director of Recycle Across America. But double-check your town's rules. Most recycle #1 and #2 plastics (find the number in the little triangle on the bottle). But there are seven total numbered plastics, and rules vary widely. Recycling your #5 yogurt container in a city that takes only #1s and #2s does more harm than good. Caps? Screw them on unless the label or your town says otherwise.

Cardboard

Gooey cheese melted on a pizza box could imperil all the clean cardboard next to it. Modern technology can handle paper with minor grease stains, says Nena Shaw of the EPA. But if it's loaded with food residue, trash it.

Jars

Great news for anyone wondering how much water they're wasting trying to rinse that last bit of peanut butter from the jar: The EPA says "spatula clean"—scraping out as much residue as you can—is good enough.

Plastic film

Remove and trash the plastic in tissue boxes and cellophane from pasta cartons before recycling—but don't stress if you forget; it won't spoil the batch. Window envelopes, coupons, and sticky notes can go in with paper.

Skip

PLASTIC STRAWS AND UTENSILS
Make it a habit to skip straws and specify, "No cutlery, please!" when you order takeout.

MIXED MATERIALS
Items like toothpaste tubes and floss containers mix metals and plastics. A surprise no-no: disposable coffee cups—they're paper coated in plastic.

PLASTIC BAGS
Tossing in even one grocery bag or paper towel wrapper (or putting recyclables in a trash bag) can jam processing machines or divert entire truckloads to the landfill. Supermarkets, municipal buildings, and libraries often have drop boxes.



editors' picks

COMPOST WITH THE MOST



"Composting relieves my guilt over the occasional wilted salad bag. Love this bin's small footprint and charcoal filter." CAITLIN SOLE, *bhg.com*
Bamboozle Composter, $50; *food52.com*



"Great for beginners (me!), this easy-to-tuck-away model is open on the bottom so you attract beneficial earthworms." STEPHEN ORR, *editor in chief*
Deluxe Pyramid Composter II, $100; *gardeners.com*