

Eco-Tip for 9/24/17

Simple Fixes to Make Kitchen Recycling Work for You

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For households with a member who is unenthusiastic about recycling, sometimes the smallest of excuses can lead to a lapse in program participation. Fortunately, there are ways to prevent problems with a kitchen recycling container. Those in the household who want to keep a recycling container in the kitchen can use these tips to overcome objections or prevent problems before they occur.

Wasted water: Skeptics of recycling sometimes question whether the water used to clean sticky residue from plastic or glass jars is justified by the energy saved in recycling. Here's the good news. You do not need to wash your recyclables. Scrape out leftover food to keep recyclables clean and dry, but rely on the high temperatures of recycling to burn off the residue and sanitize the material.

Leaks: Households with members who ignore the above direction and fail to scrape out leftovers will likely make some of the paper in their recycling bin unrecyclable. This is the downside of recycling through commingled (mixed) collection. If your household is one of the contaminators ruining paper, you can at least make the best of a bad situation by lining your recycling container with the newspaper or junk mail you would likely be ruining anyway. Dump the recycling in the recycling cart, and if the paper is contaminated by residue, dump it in the garbage. If the paper isn't contaminated, you can save it and use it again as a lining. This prevents leaks from making your kitchen recycling container smelly or difficult to clean. Paper under a bag also absorbs leaks and prevents dripping if you bring a bag from your kitchen container to your curbside cart.

Dryer sheets for going bagless: The two sorting centers in Ventura County prefer to receive your recyclables unbagged. They have sorters who will rip open most bags from recycling containers (focusing on transparent bags which visibly contain recyclables), but they also have automated sorting systems designed to work best with unbagged recyclables. Of course, if you have no bag in your kitchen recycling container, even if you line with paper to absorb leaks, eventually, your container may stink. Since washing and drying a recycling container is an infrequent chore in most households, you can use a dryer sheet to remove odors. Wipe the container with a dryer sheet, and then add it to your liner layer. It is unrecyclable, so put it in the trash when you are done. For less waste and a more natural approach, baking soda is also good for absorbing odors.

Bag management: If you feel you must use a bag indoors, it is easy to dump your bag into your curbside cart and reuse the bag. However, some households insist on bagging recyclables in their curbside cart. Tips for handling bags are the same for recycling as they are for trash. If your container shape sometimes results in suction on a bag you are trying to pull out, and if the resulting tug-of-war sometimes makes a mess, you can solve this problem by drilling two small holes on opposite sides, near the bottom of the

container. Second, rather than paying extra for drawstring bags, just use the “dog ear” method to make your bag fit its container. Pinch excess bag on one side, then loop the pinched plastic around itself to make a knot. Doing it on each side makes the best fit. Third, keep extra bags in the bottom of the container for quick replacement. Use a transparent bag for recycling so the sorters know to open your bag. For your trash bag, buy a brand made with post-consumer recycled content, noted on the packaging.

Bag storage: Despite California’s grocery bag ban, we still receive plastic bags from other retailers. Use an old tissue box and a hanging canvas bag to store and dispense them for reuse. You can use separate boxes for different sized trash or recycling containers, and perhaps another one to store bags for doggie duty.

Don’t let simple maintenance issues stop you from recycling in the most important room of your house. Keep a recycling container in your kitchen, and follow these easy steps to prevent problems your family skeptic might otherwise use to oppose recycling.