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Wood You Recycle? Guidelines for Your “Yard Waste” Cart

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Curbside yard waste carts may be tan, green, or other colors in various parts of Ventura County, but all programs abide by some of the same rules regarding which materials may be placed inside carts for collection.

Most importantly, lumber is always allowed to be mixed with yard clippings in yard waste curbside containers, even if the wood has nails.

You do not have to remove nails or other small metal hardware (e.g. hinges) to recycle a piece of wood. At mulch-making sites, loaders lift wood and yard clippings into giant tub grinders, and the resulting shreds pass by powerful magnets, removing metal. The guideline for recycling is metal attachments must be smaller than a door knob. Larger items (such as Christmas tree stands) can get knocked around by the hammers of a tub grinder and become dangerous projectiles, posing a risk to workers.

Some types of wood are not accepted in curbside yard waste carts. “Treated” wood is banned because it can make mulch or compost unfit for use in gardens or on farms. Wood treated to prevent insect damage or rot is usually identifiable by its green dye or by a series of small holes in symmetrical patterns, and can be legally disposed only by making arrangements with a local landfill (calling ahead and then notifying the scale house staff so you can be directed to a portion of the landfill designated for those types of loads).

Although treated wood is not acceptable, stained wood is acceptable, so solid wood furniture can be mixed with yard clippings, provided you can break it apart and fit the pieces into your yard waste cart. However, wood furniture pieces are problematic if they include attached textiles or other material.

Plywood is recyclable, even if it is oriented strand board. In contrast, particle board must be disposed. You can distinguish plywood from particle board based primarily on hardness. Plywood is made of wood pieces, held together to be as strong as lumber. Particle board, on the other hand, crumbles and often includes a plastic veneer.

Unfortunately, reuse options are also not available for particle board. Habitat for Humanity’s ReStores in Simi Valley and Oxnard generally accept high quality donated home improvement items, but they do not accept furniture made from particle board. The only reliable reuse option for particle board furniture is to list an item for sale or free on Craigslist.

Palm fronds are another category of wood leading to recycling confusion. Officially, they are not allowed in some local yard waste recycling programs. Too many in a load can either jam grinders or reduce the quality of resulting mulch. Although a few in a large load

will not cause problems, it is usually better to dispose fronds, along with ivy and yucca, which wrap around grinders.

Recycling correctly in your yard waste cart results in better quality mulch and compost, helping stabilize refuse collection costs.