

Homes & Real estate

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Recycling, composting and properly handling your waste will make your garbage at home less stinky and more sanitary.



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, Special to The Seattle Times



Ecoconsumer

Garbage has a foul reputation, mostly because it's "yucky." But it doesn't have to be.

Recycling, composting and properly handling your waste will make your garbage at home less stinky and more sanitary. At the same time, you'll help make sure that most of your trash gets turned into useful materials.

Here's how to de-yuckify a few common types of household waste:

Food: Beat the stink

Your kitchen-garbage container will smell better when you keep

food scraps out of it. Most Seattle-area residents of single-family homes, and many apartment dwellers, can put food waste in their outside yard-waste container for eventual composting. Most programs accept all food scraps including meat, fish and dairy, along with food-soiled paper such as napkins.

To make food-scraps collection easy, place a small container on your kitchen counter or under the sink. Line the container with a compostable bag, available at many local retailers. Many kitchen-counter compost containers use simple carbon/charcoal filters, which help minimize odors.

Companies that accept organic waste turn it into compost or fuel, such as natural gas. If you want to dig in yourself, you can put certain food scraps such as vegetable trimmings in a backyard-compost bin or worm-composting bin.

Diapers: The poop scoop

Dirty diapers are high on any list of yucky waste. So consider a cloth-diaper service or wash your own cloth diapers. Both those methods keep diapers out of the garbage and usually cost less than

disposables. Thanks to new products and Internet resources, washing diapers at home is much more convenient than 20 years ago.

If you use disposable diapers, shake out poop into the toilet and make a tight ball with the diaper. Put several diapers in a used plastic bag, such as a grocery-store produce bag, to reduce odors in your garbage can.

Several programs over the years have attempted to process disposable diapers and recycle the plastic in them, but these efforts in the U.S. have always pooped out because of high costs and logistics issues.

Carpet: Stepping up recycling

On the larger end of the yucky-waste spectrum lie old carpet and mattresses.

For carpet to have any recycling potential at all, you need to keep it dry. Because of the possibility of water damage, don't install carpet in bathrooms or basements. Most Seattle basements eventually flood, and climate change may make that problem even worse.

Ask your carpet retailer or installer to try to recycle your old carpet. Carpet-recycling options are slowly increasing as governments and nonprofits put pressure on the carpet industry to help provide recycling.

Mattresses: Waste awakening

Though some old mattresses are yucky, if yours is in decent shape you may be able to donate it. Consult [King County's "What Do I Do With...?"](#) website for reuse and recycling options for mattresses (and carpet).

Like carpet recycling, mattress recycling is currently limited but has growth potential. Also like carpet, mattress recycling has been constrained by a lack of consistent markets for the component materials. For mattresses these include metal, wood, plastics and natural fabrics.

Pet waste: Putrid piles

Last but not least in yuckiness, we'll get into, or perhaps step around, pet waste. Most local governments currently recommend that you put it in a plastic bag, or double bag it, and place it in the garbage.

Entombing dog and cat poop in plastic in a landfill for hundreds of years is far from ideal, but it's currently considered the best option. Because of potential bacteria and water-pollution concerns, burying pet waste in the ground or flushing it down the toilet are no longer commonly recommended. Don't put it in your yard-waste-collection cart or compost bin either.

Because pet waste is organic, it could someday be handled separately from garbage and turned into a useful product. In California and Massachusetts, small experimental projects have already produced usable methane gas from pet poop.

Grossed out yet? You shouldn't be. Garbage is us, really. It's just a part of our lives that we don't use anymore, and we need to find a safe, beneficial home for it.

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