



Sustainable Solutions: Your Guide to Healthier Homes and Communities

May 2024



Bag the bags! Sack the sacks! Forget the Film! Trash the Tanglers!

Reflections from one of Metro's recycling experts:

On a recent visit to one of the facilities that sorts materials from our recycling bins, I was surprised by the number of plastic bags and other plastic “film” in the mix. These are one of the most problematic materials for our recycling system, yet large numbers of them find their way into our bins.

What’s the big deal? After being picked up from our homes, mixed recycling is taken to a facility to be separated, wrapped into a bale and shipped to businesses that can make new products from the materials. Film plastic is thin and clingy and often ends up in the wrong bales, contaminating the load.

Additionally, sorting happens through a combination of machine labor and manual labor where workers sort over a conveyor belt. Plastic bags, plastic wrap, bubble wrap, and other “tangles” gum up the works, snaking into the sorting machinery. From time to time, everything needs to shut down so that a worker can use a box cutter to manually remove the tangles from the machines – a difficult and sometimes dangerous task. Plastic film also can damage the

machines, costing thousands of dollars in preventable repairs.

So please remember to keep these items out of the recycling! If you have a collection of bread bags, bubble wrap, etc. that you would like to get rid of, contact [Metro](#)'s recycling experts.



Metro in the classroom

Metro has a long history of providing waste prevention and recycling information and outreach to schools, taking the lead after 1983's [Opportunity to Recycle Act](#), which mandated recycling education. Metro's school programs help K-12 students learn about recycling and composting, natural resources, climate change and alternatives to toxics.

In Metro's *Beyond Recycling* classroom program, for example, early elementary students play a collaborative game to learn how they can go beyond recycling to prevent waste at home and in school. In Metro's *Stuff to Storms* classroom program, middle and high school youth think critically about the connection between resource consumption and climate disruption, and the individual and collective actions they can do to make our system more sustainable.

Classroom-based waste prevention programs are available *free of charge* to all schools within Metro's service boundary. In 2023, Metro, Clackamas County and our Outdoor School partners served over 28,000 students.

For more information about Metro's elementary and secondary classroom presentations visit Metro's [education resources website](#).



Portland Fruit Tree Project creates resource to increase harvest and sharing of urban fruit

[Portland Fruit Tree Project](#) is a nonprofit organization that works with residents to share in the harvest and care of urban fruit trees. Tending to urban fruit trees helps prevent waste, builds community knowledge and resources, and creates sustainable ways to obtain healthy, locally grown food.

In 2022, Portland Fruit Tree Project received a \$84,400 grant from Metro's [Investment and Innovation grant program](#) to develop a [fruit tree index](#). This map of tree data helps the organization plan for the long-term growth and viability of Portland's fruit trees, reducing wasted fruit. The grant provided training opportunities for community members to learn about tree care and data collection. Tree data was also used to create tree care plans to help less healthy trees become more viable in future seasons.

Over the course of the grant, 135 community members participated in workshops and 65 residents received coaching sessions to learn how to care for fruit trees. Nearly 700 fruit trees were indexed through partnerships with community-based organizations. Portland Fruit Tree Project had a record-breaking harvest season in 2023 with 57 harvests collecting over 10,000 pounds of fruit.

There have been many community benefits that came from this project including providing rescued fruit to people without access to fresh food. The project also created workforce development opportunities. And neighborhoods benefited by having healthier fruit trees with fewer pests.

The index continues to be used to track fruit trees in the greater Portland area.

Residents can learn more about adding new fruit trees to the index on [Portland Fruit Tree Project's website](#).



Problem solve your lawn issues

Weeds and moss can spread throughout lawns in areas where grass has thinned, and bare spots have formed. While some flowering lawn weeds may look bad, keep in mind that these weeds can actually benefit your yard, since many attract pollinating insects. Here are tips for what to do if you spot weeds, moss or other issues in your lawn.

1. Identify what the issue is with your lawn. For weeds, it isn't necessary to remove every weed in your lawn, and frequent mowing can prevent weeds from spreading. Check out Oregon State University's [Solve Pest Problems](#) website for help with any lawn problem.
2. Determine why the problem is occurring. Shade or pooling water in your lawn can encourage moss to grow and weaken grass in your lawn.
3. Fix any issues that are contributing to the problem. You may need to thin branches in shade trees, add drainage to low spots in the lawn or add nutrients, like natural fertilizers.
4. Remove weeds or moss and [overseed the lawn](#) in the spring or fall. Without annual overseeding of the lawn, grass can thin and bare spots can form, allowing weeds and moss to spread. By removing weeds and then adding grass seeds and compost to the lawn, you can create a dense lawn that will keep out weeds and moss.
5. If you want an alternative to grass, use an eco-lawn mix of dwarf perennial ryegrass, yarrow, clover, English daisy and alyssum.



Protect your skin this summer

Use these tips to protect your skin from harmful UV rays when outdoors this summer while reducing exposure to harmful chemicals in some sunscreens.

1. Look at the active ingredients on the label. Choose mineral sunscreens that have zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These are the safest for the health of you, your family and local waterways. Check out the Environmental Working Group's [Skin Deep database](#) to see how safe your sunscreen is.
2. Protect yourself from harmful UV rays by applying a thick coat of a "broad spectrum" sunscreen with at least SPF 30 every two hours.
3. Find shade when possible and wear a hat and long sleeves to protect from sunburns.
4. Plan outdoor activities around the sun, avoiding peak hours between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are most intense.
5. Avoid sunscreen for children less than 6 months old.
6. Wash off sunscreen from your skin once you are out of the sun.



Free household hazardous waste disposal

Metro offers free household hazardous waste disposal year-round at its facilities in NW Portland and Oregon City. Bring batteries, pesticides, motor oil, paint, cleaners, medical sharps and more.

[Metro Central Station](#)

6161 NW 61st Ave., Portland 97210

Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Saturday.

[Metro South Station](#)

2001 Washington St., Oregon City 97045

Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

Visit oregonmetro.gov/hhw or call (503) 234-3000 for more information.

Leftover paint can also be brought to MetroPaint Outlet, where unwanted paint is remade new and exclusive, limited-edition discounted colors are available for purchase.

[MetroPaint](#) Outlet

4825 N Basin Ave, Portland

Open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Calendar of Community Events

Summer is just around the corner, and that means summer programming is too! Beginning Friday May 31st, join Metro garden educators at the Oregon Zoo Wildlife Garden every Friday and Saturday from 10am - 2pm throughout the summer for [fun, family-friendly activities](#). With zoo admission, all ages are welcome to join in this family fun event! Drop in anytime between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Blue Lake Regional Park Reopening

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 25th for the [reopening of Blue Lake Regional Park](#)! Visit the Blue Lake Natural Discovery Garden on your next stop there or check out other [learning gardens](#) closest to you. Be sure to visit our [website calendar](#) to learn more about upcoming community events, educational programs and volunteer opportunities.

Stay informed

Subscribe to Metro's quarterly newsletter, Sustainable Solutions, which provides resources for waste prevention from Metro and community partners. Learn helpful tips for recycling, gardening and reducing toxic chemicals in your home and yard

Subscribe



[Signup to receive updates on the Waste Prevention and Environmental Services work that matters to you.](#)

To change your subscriptions or unsubscribe from this digest, go to [manage your subscriptions](#). To be removed from all Metro newsletters and newsfeed digests, you can [globally unsubscribe](#).