



## Sustainable Solutions: Your Guide to Healthier Homes and Communities

September 2024



### Reducing food waste in your home

Oregonians throw away an average of 2.3 pounds of food per person, per week, wasting about \$720 per resident every year. That's the equivalent of every person in Oregon throwing out 187 meals each year.

It takes a lot of resources to grow, produce and move food to your local market – resources that are lost when food is wasted. While many people can turn their food scraps into compost, most food waste ends up in landfills where it creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

A few things that we can do to reduce this waste are:

- Buy locally produced food when possible. Food made near us is far less likely to go bad in transit.
- Buy only as much food as you need.

- Prevent that moldy block of cheese by planning your meals ahead, making a shopping list and sticking with it.
- Buy imperfect food products from markets and vendors that sell them – many retailers won't sell irregularly shaped tomatoes or potatoes with too many eyes, even though these foods are perfectly tasty and nutritious. Sometimes you can even get these “flawed” foods at reduced cost!

Also, there are many things that we can do to make the foods we buy last longer, simply by storing them properly. Not all fruits and veggies like to be kept the same way and knowing how to keep them fresh longer can save money and resources. Fortunately, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has compiled many useful tips for keeping your greens green and your bananas yellow, which you can find on their [“don't let good food go bad”](#) website.



*Photo courtesy of PDX Saints Love*

### **Community highlight: PDX Saints Love**

With support from [Metro's Regional Refresh Fund](#), the nonprofit [PDX Saints Love](#) recently completed a free dumpster day collection event in the Lents neighborhood in Portland. They collected 6 tons of trash and diverted or recycled about 500 pounds of other materials. The event helped neighbors properly dispose of furniture and other things that are too big to fit into

trash cans, which helps to prevent illegal dumping in the area. Event organizers said, “We love partnering with Metro on these! It’s always easy and we can make a huge impact in a way that doesn’t put pressure on our small organization.”

Do you know of a nonprofit organization interested in organizing a similar event? Metro’s Regional Refresh Fund has extra funding through June 30, 2025, and we’re eager to support community-led cleanup projects across the region. This program is designed to advance cleanup efforts and improve garbage and recycling services in underserved communities.

Organizations interested in tackling litter, organizing large household item collection events, recycling drives, or even mural installations to beautify neighborhoods could be a perfect fit for the Regional Refresh Fund. Qualifying proposals can receive up to \$5,000 per project.

Key project types include:

- Cleanup of litter or abandoned garbage
- Large household item collection events (centralized drop-off events in the community)
- Recycling events
- Mural installation projects (limited-time funding available)

To be eligible, projects must serve an equity focus area, an environmentally sensitive area, or otherwise benefit an underserved community. Visit the [Regional Refresh Fund website](#) to learn more.



*Photo courtesy of IRCO*

### **New Beginnings Market helps newcomers set up their homes**

The [Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization \(IRCO\)](#) is a nonprofit with a mission to welcome, serve, and empower people across cultures and generations to reach their full potential. IRCO serves tens of thousands of refugees, immigrants and other clients every year.

In 2023, IRCO was selected to receive an [Investment and Innovation grant](#) of \$100,000 to support the [New Beginnings Market](#), which accepts donations of gently used furniture and household items to redistribute to its clients. The organization launched the market in response to an unprecedented need to support resettlement efforts for incoming Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.

Grant funds support staff salaries and warehouse expenses for this program. As of this summer, the New Beginnings Market has served more than 700 clients in 2024, distributing more than 5,750 items.



### **Natural fragrances**

Many products found around your home, including those that you use on your skin and hair, contain added fragrances. Unfortunately, many of these fragrances are made from toxic chemicals called phthalates that can harm the health of you, your family and your pets.

You can choose safer products that are free of these chemicals, or you can make your own fragrances at home with simple recipes. Essential oils are a great and safe way to add fragrances, as these oils are made from pure, organic ingredients.

If purchasing a product, search the Environmental Working Group's [Healthy Living app](#) database to find out which products are safe, or look for products labeled "free and clear," which are made without added fragrances.

Many air fresheners and scented candles also contain unhealthy chemicals that can harm adults

and children. Fortunately, there are easy-to-make alternatives that are safer for the whole family, like this homemade potpourri:

### **Homemade Potpourri**

Ingredients:

- 5 cups water
- 2 navel oranges, peeled
- 1 apple, sliced in half
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 star anise pods
- 1 teaspoon-sized knob of fresh ginger
- 1 teaspoon cardamom pods
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon dried orange peel

### **Directions:**

Combine all ingredients together in a saucepan and heat on low until simmering. Keep this going for a few hours, adding additional water when needed. You can also use a crockpot on any setting and heat the mixture with the lid off.



### **Tips for improving indoor air quality**

Maintaining indoor air quality is now more important than ever, especially during the fall and winter, when homes are sealed tight against the cold.

- Clean your home regularly with [non-toxic or homemade products](#).
- Use exhaust fans or open windows while cooking or cleaning to let in fresh air.
- Choose natural ways to scent your home, such as with an essential oil diffuser instead of plug-ins or room sprays.
- Change the furnace filters frequently; consider a room air purifier with a HEPA filter to help boost air quality.
- Bring your infrequently used cleaning products to a [hazardous waste facility](#) or collection event, since these can release chemicals, even when not in use, and affect your air quality.



### Vegetable seed saving

Growing your own vegetables at home can be fun and provide you and your family with fresh, organic food. You can get a jump start on next season, by [collecting seeds](#) from your favorite vegetables to grow next year.

#### Seed saving tips:

- Collect seeds at the end of the growing season from healthy plants.
- Store them in a cool, dry place or share them with family and friends.
- Label seed packets with the name of the plant and date collected.
- Choose seeds from heirloom varieties for consistency each year or collect seeds from any variety, if you don't mind being surprised.
- Check out [Metro's online learning](#) website and [YouTube channel](#) and learn to collect and save seeds from [tomatoes](#), [beans](#), [cucumbers](#) and [basil](#).

## Calendar of Community Events

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.

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