



## How to Dispose of Your Pile of Plastic Bags

by Nicole C Fitz | Aug 9, 2018 | Greener Than Before, Recycle

### Grocery Store Plastic Bags

Everyone is going all in against plastic shopping bags. I get it. They pile up pretty quickly. They're flimsy and sometimes barely make it from the grocery store to your car, so you double bag it and end up with even more bags.

Now you're at home and don't know what to do with them. Of course, you try to re-use them. Maybe you even take them back to the store to use in your next round of groceries. But more than likely, after you've done all you can with them, you throw them away and hope they break down before they end up as a whale's main food source.

Or, you rage against them all together and bring your own reusable bags to the store with you.

### Reusable Bags Instead of Single-Use Plastic Bags

I tried this for the first time recently. I gathered all the reusable shopping bags that I've acquired over time from green markets, where they pass them out to you when you arrive, to the grocery stores in London where you have to buy them. I've also purchased a few from my local Miami grocery stores where it was optional.



One has a thermal lining, which is great for the frozen foods. The one from Sainsbury's is made out of 33% recycled materials.

I hadn't noticed how many I had collected over the years. Always with the intent to use them for grocery shopping *next time*.

I strolled into the grocery store determined not to leave with a single plastic bag. At check-out time, I told the cashier, "Please no plastic bags, I've brought my own." I packed my reusable bags as quickly as possible while the people in line stared, and the cashier rolled her eyes at how long it was taking. But I didn't let any of that deter me.

I was happy to discover that I hadn't even used all of the bags that I'd brought. I bounced back to my car, grinning with glee at my environmental accomplishment. Unpacking the car at home was quicker because I didn't use as many bags as when the cashier packs plastic bags. I was quite proud of myself.

## It's more than shopping bags

At home, looking at the unpacked groceries, I saw plastic bags everywhere. I realized I'd put the fruit in those plastic produce bags. I hadn't even noticed at the time. The bread bag, the bag the potatoes came in, the toilet paper wrap – all versions of plastic bags that I never considered before.

It left me feeling a little defeated and wondering, "How do I recycle this stuff?"

There is obviously more to the "plastic bag" than just shopping bags. While I know it helps not to add a load of unnecessary plastic bags to the garbage bin, which is exactly where it ends up, let's face it, I realized that there are some plastics that we use and *need* regardless of how we feel about it.

Plastic bags and films are too lightweight and tend to clog the recycling machinery. So, you can't usually recycle the bags through your curbside pick-up programs.

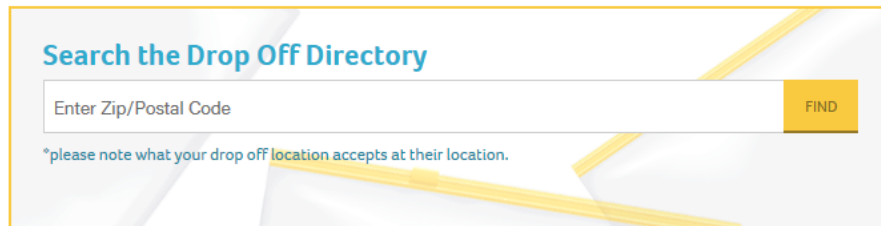
But that doesn't mean you can't recycle them.

## Store Drop Off for Recycling Plastic Bags

You can take the plastic grocery bags, and several other kinds of plastic wrap, back to the grocery store and place them in a designated bin for recycling plastic bags and films. Many major grocery chains have the plastic bag recycle bin available in their stores.

There are several ways that you can find the closest drop-off location.

### [Plasticfilmrecycling.org](http://Plasticfilmrecycling.org)



The screenshot shows a search bar titled "Search the Drop Off Directory". Inside the search bar is the placeholder text "Enter Zip/Postal Code" and a yellow "FIND" button. Below the search bar is a note: "\*please note what your drop off location accepts at their location." The background of the search area features a stylized image of a white plastic bag with yellow recycling lines.

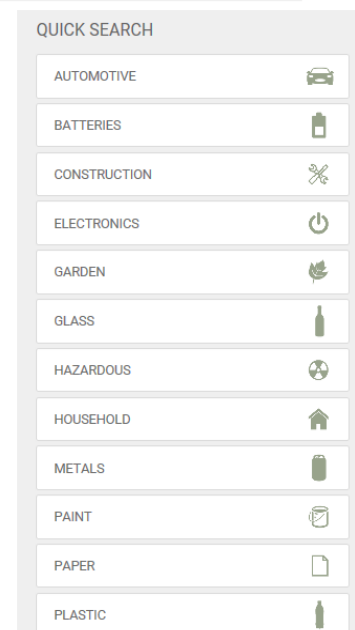
The Plastic Film Recycling site has a plastic bag drop off directory. Type in your zip code, and you'll see a list of the grocery stores near you that will accept plastic bags, films, and wraps for recycling. The bags don't have to be from that store. Any participating store will accept bags and wraps from any other store. Just be sure to check what is allowed at each location because it varies.

### [Earth911.com](http://Earth911.com)















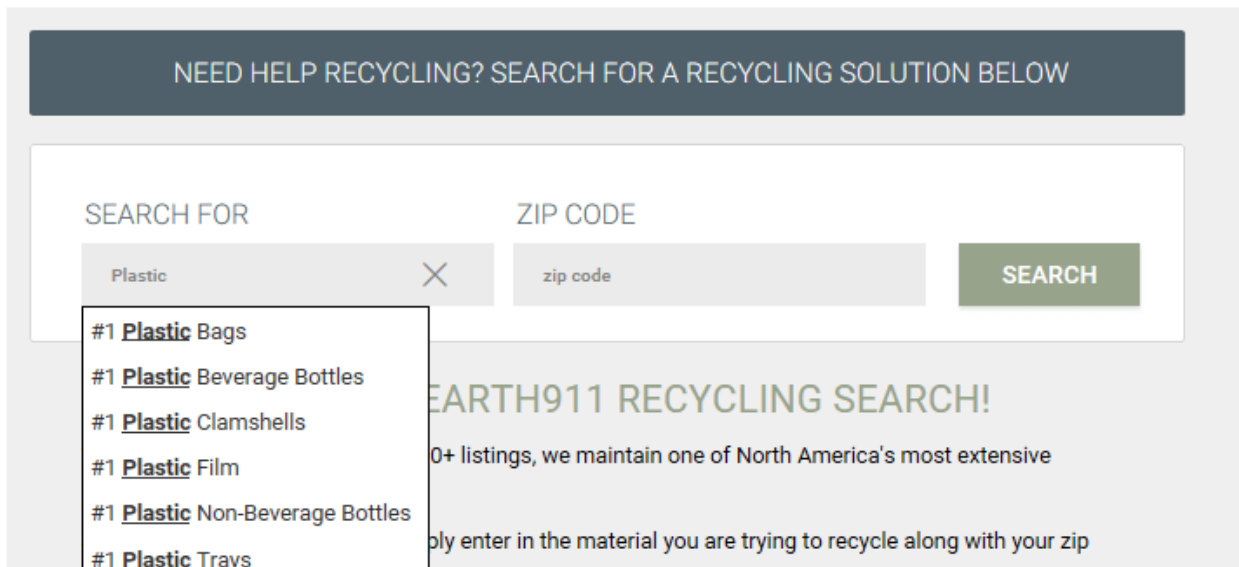
The Earth911 site provides a little more detail regarding what you're looking to recycle, along with how to and where.

There is a quick search list with everything you could think of to recycle, and some things you probably didn't. If you search for "plastic" you get a list of the kind of plastic in relation to its resin identification code, and then where you can drop it off based on your zip code.



The screenshot shows a "QUICK SEARCH" dropdown menu with the following items:

AUTOMOTIVE	
BATTERIES	
CONSTRUCTION	
ELECTRONICS	
GARDEN	
GLASS	
HAZARDOUS	
HOUSEHOLD	
METALS	
PAINT	
PAPER	
PLASTIC	



What is a [resin identification code](#)?

A resin identification code is the number in the middle of the recycling arrows that you may see on some products. Each number represents a type of plastic determined by what it's made of and its properties. Typically, for plastic bags, resins **#2** and **#4** are recyclable.



**HDPE**

**High Density Polyethylene** – Used for milk, water, shampoo, laundry detergent and dish wash bottles, cereal box liners, **grocery bags**, and **retail shopping bags**.



**LDPE**

**Low Density Polyethylene** – Used for **dry cleaning, newspaper, bread, fresh produce, and household garbage bags**. Also used for **shrink wrap**, milk carton and hot/cold beverage cup coatings, squeezable bottles, and toys.

That's a lot to take in (and look up) when you just want to know what bin to put something in when you're done using it. Which leads us to another helpful website.

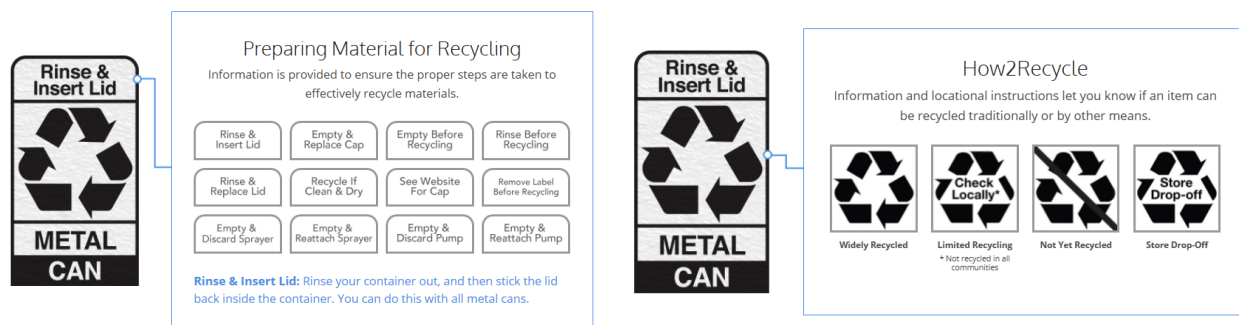
## [How2Recycle.info](http://How2Recycle.info)



How2Recycle is a standardized labeling system that is sorely needed. It skips over the resin numbers and instead clearly explains how to recycle the packaging, taking away a lot of the mystery of, “what do I do with this?”

### **Clear. Consistent. Concise.**

Recycling labels that make sense.



Environmentally conscious brands that have partnered with How2Recycle have these labels on their products. And there is an impressive list of brands. The site provides a lot of information about recycling that we need to know, but don't usually look up.

If you're thinking, it's just a few bags, it's not a big deal, consider that in 2015 the [EPA](#) Data Tables reported about 4.13 million tons of plastic bags, sacks and wraps were generated. Only .53 million tons of that was recycled. Around 2.89 million tons ended up in landfills. And we all know, quite a bit of that amount ended up in our waterway systems and oceans. That was three years ago. Imagine the numbers today.

We tend to feel really comfortable with separating our garbage into green or blue bins and not looking back. But the truth is, even if we manage to never take another plastic shopping bag away from the grocery store, there are other kinds of bags that we will have to dispose of. We should do that as responsibly as possible.