



GreenTip
How Do You Measure Up?

Recycling Plastics – Unraveling the Mysteries

Most everyone recognizes the now familiar plastics recycling symbol – the triangle of chasing arrows that surrounds a single digit number. This symbol was developed back in 1988 by The Society of the Plastics Industry as a system for use in identifying different types of plastics. Nowadays, most states require plastic containers of all types, up to 5 gallons in size, to carry the symbol. Although there are actually 7 different plastic designations, there are only two that can be recycled through the various residential collection and drop-off programs found throughout Guilford County.

About #1 and #2 Plastics:

The easiest and most common type of plastic to recycle is polyethylene terephthalate, or PETE, also known as polyester. PETE is designated as the number “1” in the plastics identification system and is used in the manufacture of soda and water bottles, medicine bottles and many other types of consumer containers. After processing, recycled PETE can become fiberfill for use in comforters, winter coats and sleeping bags, fiber for carpet and fleece clothing, plastic furniture, car bumpers, plastic film and sheeting used in plastic wraps and bags, and of course, new plastic bottles and containers.

The second most commonly recycled plastic resin is high density polyethylene, or HDPE. HDPE is identified as the number “2” and is used to produce such things as milk and detergent bottles, cosmetics containers, as well as cereal box liners and plastic bags, plastic lumber and wire and cable covering. Products made with recycled HDPE include bottles and containers for non-food items such as shampoo, detergents and motor oil, plastic pipe, buckets, toys, flower pots and recycling bins.

Bottles Only, Please!

While there are many products and materials made from PETE and HDPE, **only plastic bottles** can be recycled through your residential collection or drop-off program in Guilford County! This is true in all of our cities and towns, as well as the more rural, unincorporated areas. A bottle is defined as a container that has a neck smaller than its body. This excludes plastic butter tubs and take-out containers, as well as plastic bags, films and wraps. While these items contain the same basic materials, they may also contain additives that will result in the plastic resin separating during processing. Separation results in material that is unusable and that must ultimately be thrown away. Since our goal is to recycle our used PETE and HDPE into new, useful products and materials, it is essential that items other than bottles be kept out of the recycling program.



A Note About Plastic Bags:

Just a note about plastic bags – these are very recyclable! They can become plastic lumber, shipping envelopes, trash cans and new plastic bags. In order to ensure that your used plastic grocery and retail bags are recycled into something useful, gather them up and take them to your grocery store where you'll find bag recycling containers near the entrance. Grocery stores recycle a great deal of plastic film and wrap that encases the pallets of merchandise they receive daily. Your plastic bags will be combined with this film and sent recyclers for processing and, ultimately, manufacturing new plastic products.

