

# Getting Rid of Recycling Misconceptions

For most of us, we are not strangers to recycling. While some may feel accustomed to tossing plastic, paper, metal and glass into a green or blue recycling container with ease, others might have questions, concerns, or quite frankly, might not recycle simply because it seems too complicated. For instance, if it is too greasy, can it still be recycled? Or, is it ok to leave the caps and lids on? Without a bit of guidance, the rules of recycling can seem foggy and even daunting at times. So, here are five common misconceptions about recycling to help demystify the process and make you a more confident recycler.

## MISCONCEPTION #1: PAPER TOWELS ARE RECYCLABLE SINCE THEY ARE MADE OF PAPER.

**Fact:** Paper towels, napkins and tissues are made from a low quality paper with short fibers that cannot be recycled into new things. These items are also typically stained with food or grease, which also make them unrecyclable.

**Tip:** Instead of using paper towels in your kitchen, try a washable dish cloth. Not only can it be reused, but it will end up saving you money and add some pizzazz to your kitchen décor.



## MISCONCEPTION #2: PLASTIC BAGS AND STYROFOAM CAN BE RECYCLED.

**Fact:** Leon County does not accept plastic bags or Styrofoam as recyclable products because plastic bags tend to easily snag on recycling machinery.

**Tip:** However, most large grocery stores in Leon County will accept plastic bags and clean Styrofoam for recycling - simply look for a labeled drop-off bin at the front of the store.

Even better, avoid waste altogether by using a reusable tote bag to carry your groceries, and try to dodge Styrofoam by bringing a reusable cup to places that use Styrofoam products. Most local coffee shops will make your favorite drink directly in your own to-go tumbler.



**MISCONCEPTION #3:  
“CARDBOARD” MILK  
AND JUICE CARTONS CAN  
BE RECYCLED.**

**Fact:** Contrary to popular belief, milk and juice cartons cannot be recycled in Leon County. Although they look to be made of cardboard, they are actually a hybrid of multiple materials, making them difficult and costly to separate.

**Tip:** Get crafty and find innovative ways to reuse these cartons. You can even cut them in half to be used as planters for indoor herb gardens.



**MISCONCEPTION #4: CAPS AND LIDS MUST BE REMOVED  
BEFORE BEING RECYCLED.**



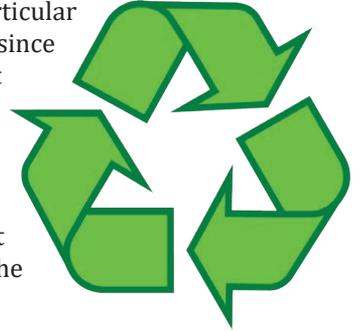
**Fact:** Caps and lids can be left on. In fact, it is preferred that you leave them attached to the bottle. But, be sure to rinse out bottles before placing them in the recycling bin.

**Tip:** If an item has excessive grease or food residue that cannot be easily cleaned, like a peanut butter jar, it is best not to recycle these items for fear of contaminating other clean recyclables and render them unrecoverable.

**MISCONCEPTION #5: IF ITEMS HAVE A RECYCLING  
SYMBOL, THEY ARE RECYCLABLE ANYWHERE.**

**Fact:** Recycling is a highly localized process. The recycling symbol is placed on products by the manufacturer to indicate that the material has the capacity to be recycled; however, this does not mean your particular recycling program accepts it, since each facility has different machinery and capabilities.

**Tip:** If you are unfamiliar with a city’s recycling policy, be sure to check out what they do and do not accept before you throw items into the recycling bin.



If you want to become more sustainability-savvy and learn easy tips to reduce waste, make sure to check out Leon County’s Office of Sustainability website at [www.GrowingGreen.org](http://www.GrowingGreen.org). It is a great resource to learn about sustainable practices and ways to reduce your environmental footprint. We are proud to say that because of your efforts, Leon County’s current recycling rate is 54% and continues to improve every year. It goes to show that while recycling may seem confusing at times, the little effort put in is truly worth the big payoff, making a positive impact on our waste stream and our everyday life. 🌱

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