

Recycling and Composting for a Better Northfield
By Matt Rohn Guest Contributor on behalf of the Environmental Quality Commission

So, what's with all those colorful tops and information stickers on the Bridge Square waste receptacles? It's a city pilot project to increase the quality of downtown recycling and ultimately at home, work, and play. You might be surprised to know how important proper recycling is for the environment.

Why does it matter? When too many non-recyclable items enter the recycling stream, it all gets treated as trash. Haulers send those contents to the landfill, not recycling centers. Cans and glass, great! Add a plastic bag and it's garbage. The Rice County landfill is expected to be full and close by 2036 at the current rate of use, even with recycling. Spoiler alert: at present there's no plan for a new one.

Is there anything you or I can do? Absolutely. Every small step counts. We care for the environment by buying thoughtfully (Reduce), properly disposing of materials (Recycle), and repairing, sharing, or purchasing used items (Reuse). Proper recycling reduces the need for new, raw resources that add to environmental costs. Instead of sending valuable resources to the landfill to sit for thousands of years, if we recycle, we can use them in useful ways now.

How can you know what can be recycled? That's sometimes frustrating. I admit I struggle with which number plastics are ok. The city hopes the stickers will help at Bridge Square along with the lids' standard color-coding—blue for recycling and black for trash. At home consult the Rice County Waste Wizard on the county's Solid Waste Facility webpage (<https://www.co.rice.mn.us/207/Solid-Waste-Facility>). Type in the item and learn if it can be recycled. Throw everything else in the trash. Don't recycle plastic bags or very small things like bottle caps that gum up the recycle machinery. (Take plastic bags to Northfield stores that collect them; fasten plastic caps back on clean and empty containers.)

Looking to make an even bigger impact? Composting table scraps is one of the most important forms of recycling. Organics make up 60% of most U.S. landfills. As organics decompose covered with dirt and robbed of oxygen, they release a much more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, methane. It's happening at the Rice County landfill. Northfield Curbside Composting (<https://www.northfieldcompost.com/>) collects food scraps and related compostables and gets them to a composting facility that can process them into soil methane-free. You can also collect organics in a biodegradable bag and drop it off at one of two city drop sites (<https://www.northfieldmn.gov/336/Organics-RecyclingComposting>) for DSI to take to a composting facility.

As a grandparent, I worry that each year we don't act, it gets warmer, there's more extreme weather, and we leave the next generation more problems. Taking relatively simple steps like composting and proper recycling help produce a better future. That's why the city of Northfield in conjunction with its Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) adopted a Climate Action Plan and the Zero Waste Plan it required. These actions create roadmaps for all of us to build a better Northfield.