



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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Department of Environmental Protection

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Recycle Smart This Holiday Season!

String lights

Though beautiful on your house, tree or mantel, string lights **don't** belong in your recycling bin. They wrap around machinery at your local recycling facility, causing sorting to come to a grinding halt. Broken string lights may be an easy fix – [try this repair tip](#). If they still don't work, many municipalities across the state provide special collection bins for string lights at the holidays or year-round as e-waste or scrap metal (search "city/town name' trash and recycling"). You can also search [Beyond the Bin](#) for collection locations. If you can't find a location near you, you can put them in the trash.

Food waste

No matter what holiday you are celebrating, a tasty meal is more than likely a central part of it! After you've cleared the table and packed your guests' leftovers, rinse out those cans and jars, and make sure everything you put in the recycling bin is free of food! Check the [Smart Recycling Guide](#) or the [Recyclopedia](#) to ensure you are putting the right things in the bin. All food waste should be placed in your compost or trash.

Gift bags, wrapping paper, ribbon, bows, and tissue paper

Once everyone has opened their gifts, what do you do with the piles of wrapping paper, broken ribbon and bows, and tissue paper? Store and plan to reuse what you can! Otherwise, gift bags can be thrown in your household recycling unless there is metallic ink, foil, or glitter on them, in which case, they go in the trash along with wrapping paper. Don't forget to cut those string handles off your gift bags before recycling! Tissue paper, ribbon, and bows that cannot be reused should be put in the trash as well.

This information is available in alternate format. Please contact Melixza Esenyie at 617-626-1282.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370
MassDEP Website: www.mass.gov/dep

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Greeting cards

Spreading holiday cheer is one of the best ways to celebrate this special time of year! Greeting cards and their envelopes are recyclable unless there is metallic ink, foil, or glitter on them, in which case, put them in the trash. Be aware of cards with [button batteries](#). They don't go in the recycling or trash because they have been known to start fires. This [battery guide](#) can help you identify and properly handle batteries.

Packing peanuts, bubble wrap and padded envelopes

Shipping boxes and packaging are unavoidable during the gift-giving season. Remember to flatten all cardboard boxes before putting them in the recycling bin – do not nest boxes within each other. Packing peanuts and any [paper envelopes with plastic padding](#) on the inside go in the trash. Bubble wrap and [fully plastic padded envelopes](#) can be brought back to your supermarket to be properly recycled along with plastic wrap and plastic bags.

Paper plates, plastic utensils, and paper napkins and cups

We get it, disposable plates, utensils, napkins, and cups make clean up easy, but unfortunately, most of that stuff cannot be recycled. All disposable paper products go in the trash. Plastic cups made of polystyrene (colored cups, or those that crack or crinkle when squeezed) also go in the trash. [Clear plastic cups](#) that easily squeeze in your hand and [aluminum cups](#) can be recycled.

Trees and wreaths

When the holidays are winding down, remember that cut Christmas trees and holiday wreaths are handled differently. Most Massachusetts cities and towns provide Christmas tree collection programs (usually during the first 2 weeks in January). The collected trees are chipped and either composted or used for mulch. If you have questions about where to take your tree for proper disposal, or when to put it on the curb, contact your city/town for information ([Massachusetts City & Town Recycling Links | Mass.gov](#)). Christmas tree collection dates are also often included on municipal trash & recycling calendars. **Remember to remove all tinsel, lights, ornaments, and/or garlands!**

Despite the fact that many wreaths are made from trees, they do not belong with Christmas tree or yard waste collection. The wires in wreaths are a contaminant, so put wreaths in the trash.

For more tips on greening your holidays, follow RecycleSmartMA.org on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#).