



Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Conscientious waste separation is crucial in order to conserve valuable resources, reduce CO₂ emissions and protect the environment.

In 2016, every German produced an average of 626 kilograms of waste, of which 220.5 kilograms was packaging waste. This is well above the European average of 480 kilograms. The total amount of waste produced in Germany was 411.5 million tonnes. Only around 9 per cent of plastic waste is recycled, the rest ends up in landfill sites, rivers or the sea.

Recycling is an important step towards reducing the use of natural resources and energy consumption. Waste separation not only enables the safe disposal of harmful waste, but also the high-quality recycling of packaging materials such as plastic and paper. According to Deutsche Umwelthilfe, packaging recycling in Germany alone avoids up to 1.7 million tonnes of CO₂ every year. Non-recycled materials usually end up being incinerated with the residual waste. However, the recyclable materials are lost in the process. To prevent this waste, consumers can collect their waste separately and recycle it.

The long decomposition time of plastic, which is made from fossil raw materials and takes at least 500 years to decompose in the environment, is particularly alarming. Every piece of plastic ever produced still exists today. This creates landfill sites and greenhouse gases that are released into the atmosphere when they are incinerated, thereby affecting the climate. Plastic is often broken down by the sun and the distance travelled and ends up as microplastics in the world's oceans. Scientists define microplastics as synthetic polymers that are difficult to break down and are smaller than five millimetres. According to current knowledge, microplastics are also likely to end up in food, which has potentially harmful effects on humans. We unconsciously ingest around five grams of plastic every week through our food, water and air. That's the equivalent of a credit card's worth of plastic. The small plastic particles can irritate the gastrointestinal tract, cause inflammation and transmit diseases. Respiratory problems such as coughing and shortness of breath are also possible. In their study, the researchers also report metabolic disorders, hormones that are not released properly and reproductive disorders such as infertility and an increased risk of miscarriages. However, research into the harmful effects of microplastics on humans is still limited.

In addition to microplastics, microfibres also pose a threat to the environment. Around 700,000 microfibres are released from synthetic textiles during every wash cycle at home. These tiny plastic particles pass through the usual filter systems into our oceans, where they are absorbed by aquatic life. One study found that synthetic fibres were detected in 63% of North Sea shrimp.

When we throw something away, it's not gone. It has to go somewhere. To tackle this problem, it is important to raise awareness of waste separation and recycling. The health of our planet therefore depends on us procuring everything we need sustainably and, ideally, reusing it. The shape of a successful and sustainable future is round: a circular economy in which we use resources sparingly and recycle endlessly. Every individual's contribution to the separate collection of packaging is a step towards climate and resource protection. Since 2015, the Circular Economy Act has obliged every citizen to separate organic waste, metal, plastic, paper and glass. Violations can be penalised with fines of around 2500 euros.

Each time it goes through the system, plastic loses quality until it is ultimately no longer recyclable and must either be incinerated or sent to landfill. Unfortunately, recycling alone will not lead us out of this environmental crisis. It is crucial to reduce waste as soon as it is produced.

There are various measures that can be taken:

- buy less stuff
- buy more recyclable or reusable packaging
- avoid plastic bags when shopping and use cloth bags instead
- Use sustainable care products such as plastic-free toothbrushes
- Buy unpackaged fruit and vegetables
- Avoid disposable plastic items, to-go drinks cups or disposable polystyrene food containers
- make better use of leftovers (soups or pizza are a good idea) and plan well before shopping
- Drink tap water instead of buying plastic or glass bottles
- Switch to green electricity and avoid highly radioactive waste
- Repair instead of buying new
- borrow appliances etc. from neighbours or friends instead of buying everything yourself
- hand in broken electrical appliances at recycling centres
- "No advertising" stickers on letterboxes; paperless account statements → Here you can register free of charge to protect yourself from unwanted advertising: <https://www.robinsonliste.de/>
- Less durable garments instead of fast fashion
- Microfibres in the laundry reduzieren → Use of fabric softener, washing at 30 degrees, washing a full load of laundry and switching from washing powder to liquid detergent

Quellen:

- [Mülltrennung: Wie Sie damit die Umwelt schützen können - FOCUS online](#)
- [Müll vermeiden: Stoppt den Wegwerfwahn! | 15 Tipps - Utopia.de](#)
- [kritisches Umwelt-Thema Müllproduktion - pandoo \(gopandoo.de\)](#)
- [FAQ: Mikroplastik – wie gefährlich ist es und wie lässt es sich vermeiden? \(rnd.de\)](#)