

Going Green in Londonderry

Confessions of a Reformed Trashaholic

A friend I'll call "Tracy" is married with two children and a dog. Before Londonderry went to one trashcan per family, Tracy put out three full bins each week. Her family didn't recycle. In fact, she used her red recycling bin to store her kids' sports equipment.

Why didn't she recycle? It was inconvenient. She keeps her trash cans in the garage, and running downstairs to deposit the recyclables several times a day didn't cut it. Why bother?

The news that families would be limited to one trash barrel hit Tracy hard. Convinced her family could never fit all their trash in one barrel, she considered paying for an extra barrel right off the bat, but decided to try the one barrel first.

The first hurdle was to figure how to make recycling easy. Her solution was to keep two reusable, fabric grocery bags in the kitchen. She throws recyclable glass, plastics and cans in one bag, and paper and cardboard in the other. Then once a day, on her way out the door, she brings the bags down with her to dump into two recycling bins in the garage. Or when her kids are going downstairs, she sends a bag down with them.

Before the new program, recycling just wasn't on the family's radar. Now, both her kids and her husband remind her if she slips and tries to throw away something that's recyclable. They recycle everything: glass and plastic bottles and jars, tin and aluminum cans, newspaper, junk mail, magazines, and corrugated and gray cardboard.

Now when her kids come home from school and empty out their backpacks, the wastepaper goes straight into the bag for recycling, and lunch bags are reused. Tracy brings reusable grocery bags to the store, and when she occasionally gets the disposable plastic bags, she either reuses them or recycles them in the bin at the front of the store.

Her family has gone from three full barrels of trash each week and no recycling, to one trash barrel --with the lid easily closed she proudly reports--and two overflowing bins of recyclables. Occasionally, she'll keep a bag of trash until the next week when she's got enough room in the trash barrel, but that's rarely necessary.

When I asked what was the hardest part of making this dramatic change, she laughs self-consciously and says that it was painless - just a matter of making it a habit. She says a lot of her friends in town went through the exact same process - from recycling little or nothing to becoming master waste reducers!

She admits she never would have started recycling without the motivation of our limited waste program, and her friends feel the same. It compelled her to reduce her trash by an incredible two-thirds...which is exactly what the program is designed to do!

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