

Household Trash & Pet Waste Disposal

The Sanitation & Hygiene chapter names garbage containment in one line, and the pet chapter names pet-waste composting in one line. Human waste already has its own real how-to in Bathroom & Hygiene Without Running Water; this guide is the how-to for the other two waste streams that stop being routine once collection service does: household garbage and pet waste.

Household garbage

Left alone, accumulating trash attracts pests and starts smelling within days, and both problems compound the longer collection is out. Sort it as you generate it rather than waiting; separating a week's worth of mixed trash after the fact is a much worse job.

- **Wet or food-contaminated waste** (food scraps, anything soiled) is the most urgent, and there's a real clock on it: fly eggs laid on exposed or poorly-sealed waste can hatch into maggots in as little as 8 to 24 hours in warm weather, and within roughly 72 hours even in cooler conditions. Double-bag it and keep it in a leak-resistant, tight-lidded container, ideally outside, away from the living space, until it can actually leave the property, and don't let it sit unsealed overnight.
- **Dry, non-organic waste** (packaging, paper, plastic) can wait considerably longer. Crush or smash it down to conserve storage space, don't let empty boxes and containers take up volume they don't need to.
- **Burnable items**, if local rules allow it, can be burned outdoors as a last resort for volume you can't otherwise store, but only certain materials are actually safe to burn: dry paper, cardboard, untreated and unpainted wood, and yard debris are fine. Never burn treated, painted, or pressure-treated wood (CCA-treated lumber releases arsenic when burned), particleboard, rubber, foam, or vinyl, these produce dioxins at ground level, a worse outcome for anyone nearby than just bagging the plastic instead. Pick a safe, cleared spot, never burn on a windy day, and stay with the fire the entire time. Check restrictions before lighting anything: call both your local fire department (for burn permits and fire-safety rules) and your county or regional air quality district (for air-quality permits and any active burn ban), most jurisdictions require clearing both, not just one.

WARNING

Flies, mosquitoes, and rodents aren't just a nuisance, they're mechanical disease carriers

A fly that lands on exposed garbage or waste and then on food carries whatever pathogen it picked up along with it, one of the actual mechanisms behind disaster-related outbreaks. The good news: proper refuse sanitation alone does roughly 90% of the work of fly control and 65% of rat control, so the containment steps above are already most of the job. What actually pest-proofs a container is the container itself: a galvanized steel can with a deep-drawn, water-resistant lid is real animal resistance, plastic lids flex and crack under a raccoon's weight in a way steel doesn't; add a bungee cord or a locking lid strap sized to the can's diameter (commonly 12 to 24 inches) if raccoons or other wildlife are actually prying lids in your area. Keep storage containers away from the house itself, and check them daily. For mosquitoes specifically, empty or remove anything that collects standing water after rain, buckets, tarps, tire ruts, old containers; a single container left standing for about a week is enough for a new generation to hatch.

Pet waste

Dog and cat waste carries its own disease risk, roundworms and other parasites, and in cats, the toxoplasmosis parasite, which is a real hazard for anyone pregnant or immunocompromised in the household (the same population this site's water-budget guidance already flags for a higher personal ration). That risk is exactly why it can't go into a food-crop compost pile the way some other organic waste can.

If anyone pregnant is in the household, they shouldn't handle cat waste at all

The CDC's specific recommendation for toxoplasmosis is that pregnant individuals avoid handling cat litter or cat waste entirely, hand it off to someone else in the household. If no one else can do it, wear disposable gloves for the task and wash hands thoroughly afterward, every time, not just when visibly soiled.

- **Bag and trash it**, the simplest option: scoop into a bag, tie it off, and add it to the same non-organic waste stream above rather than the wet-waste stream, since it doesn't decompose the same way food scraps do.
- **Or bury it**, if bagging isn't practical long-term: dig a hole **6 to 8 inches deep**, at least **200 feet** from any water source, the same distance this site's own human-waste guidance uses. Never bury it near a vegetable garden or any food-growing area; ornamental, non-food areas of the yard only.
- **Or install an in-ground pet waste digester**, a real, commercially available product (functions like a miniature septic tank: enzymes and bacteria break waste down into liquid that percolates into the soil). Site it the same distance from wells and water sources as a septic system, check local rules on that setback, and expect reduced performance in heavy clay soil or in freezing conditions.

- **Never** add pet waste to a compost pile intended for food-crop soil, even one that's otherwise well-managed. The pathogens involved routinely survive typical home composting temperatures.

Is a pet-waste compost bin or digester even legal?

Generally, yes, on your own property, for non-food-crop use. There's no state law banning pet-waste composting or digesters; what actually exists is local ordinances (setback distances from wells, similar to septic rules) and the fact that most municipal yard-waste collection programs won't accept pet waste, a program-acceptance rule, not a ban on having a bin. The strong "never put it in food-crop compost" guidance throughout this page is a health recommendation, not a legal one, though it's every bit as important to follow.

WARNING

Pyrolysis/biochar: a real advanced option, not a backyard shortcut

Heating waste to a sustained high temperature without oxygen, pyrolysis, does destroy the pathogens that survive normal composting, including the toxoplasmosis parasite in cat waste, and produces biochar, a usable soil amendment. This is genuine, actively used sanitation technology (the same principle behind commercial fecal-sludge treatment systems), not a fringe idea. But it only works if the equipment actually holds that temperature through the whole load: a backyard burn barrel or an improvised setup runs cooler in spots, and cool spots are exactly where hardy pathogens survive. If you own or build purpose-built pyrolysis equipment with a way to verify sustained temperature, this is a legitimate path for both pet waste and, per the manual's Tier 3 guidance, human waste. Without that verification, stick to bagging, burial, or the standard humanure method above, don't treat an improvised setup as equivalent to real pyrolysis.

WARNING

A method that works for human waste but not this: alkaline (lime) treatment

The manual's human-waste guidance covers hydrated lime treatment (raising pH above 12 for a couple hours) as a real, fast pathogen-kill method. Don't extend that to pet waste without caution: research on inactivating the toxoplasmosis parasite specifically shows most standard chemical treatments, including common disinfectants, don't reliably kill it; heat is the method with real evidence behind it for cat waste. Until better evidence exists for lime against this specific parasite, treat pyrolysis, not lime, as the validated option for pet waste.

Sources

- Be Ready Utah, garbage and trash disposal during an emergency (separating waste streams, burning guidance, pest-proof storage): Be Ready Utah
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- Mosquito breeding in standing water and source-reduction guidance: Northern Nevada Public Health
- Leave No Trace, pet waste burial depth (6-8 inches) and distance from water: cited via American Kennel Club
- Roundworm and toxoplasmosis risk from pet waste: EPA
- Fly egg hatching timeframe under warm conditions: University of Florida IFAS
- Pest-resistant galvanized steel container and locking-lid strap design: Behrens Manufacturing; BearSaver / Bearicuda
- Toxic combustion products from burning treated wood and synthetic materials: EPA; Wisconsin Department of Health Services
- Burn-permit and air-quality-district approval requirements: Larimer County; San Diego Air Pollution Control District
- CDC, toxoplasmosis prevention guidance for pregnant individuals: CDC
- Pyrolysis of fecal sludge, pathogen destruction and biochar output: Faecal sludge pyrolysis as a circular economic approach, Environment, Development and Sustainability; Biochar as a novel technology for treatment of onsite domestic wastewater, Frontiers
- In-ground pet waste digester mechanism and siting: Doggie Dooley
- Toxoplasma gondii oocyst resistance to standard chemical disinfectants: Techniques for inactivating Toxoplasma gondii oocysts, systematic review; Chemical inactivation of Toxoplasma gondii oocysts in water, PubMed