

## **Recycle Right: Textile Recycling – What Everyone Needs to Know**

By Juli Brazile

Some categories of recycling are easier than others. You might need glasses and a really good memory to manage all the different kinds of plastic, but others are a lot simpler. Today we are going to look at what to do with old clothes, sheets, and shoes and learn a few easy rules you can apply with confidence.

The first rule is that everything needs to be clean and dry – no mold, no awful chemicals. After that, anything goes. If a shirt or dress is too old to be resold, there is an entire industry to process them into rags or fibers. And you can donate anything made of a fabric: towels, curtains, rags, aprons, scarves, jeans and underwear.

The second rule is that shoes, gloves, belts, purses, and backpacks also count in the same big category of “textiles.” So feel free to load up anything on the list and donate them all at the same time. Some of them might be sorted for resale, but the rest can be used no matter their condition.

That’s all the rules! Although you should take the first rule seriously and throw away oil-stained rags and anything covered in weed-killer. If you don’t want to touch it, why would you put it in a bin for someone else?

And it’s worth learning these rules because tossing holey socks in the trash is a huge waste when you add it all up. According to MassDEP, textiles make up five percent of the solid waste disposed in Massachusetts. In 2010, Massachusetts residents disposed of 230,000 tons of useful old clothing, footwear and other fabric materials. This means that the average Massachusetts resident is throwing away approximately 70 pounds of potentially useful material each year.

And it really is useful. Cotton can be made into rags or form a component for new high-quality paper. Knitted or woven woolens can be pulled into fibers that are used as car insulation or seat stuffing. Other types of fabric can be reprocessed into fibers for upholstery, insulation, and even building materials. Buttons and zippers are stripped off for reuse. Very little is left over at the end of the recycling process. The remaining natural materials, such as various grades of cotton, can be composted.

So now that you know how easy it is, in Arlington, you can bring all these items to the Goodwill truck behind Stop & Shop or look for any of the dozens of clothing/shoe bins around town hosted by Planet Aid, Red Cross or St. Vincent DePaul Society. The self-service bins are available 24/7 for your convenience and Goodwill has staff at its donation trailer seven days a week from 8 am to 4 pm. We also have a Planet Aid clothing/shoe bin at the DPW Recycling Center on Saturday mornings if you want to save up a bag of items to bring by once a month.

*Arlington Recycling Committee welcomes your involvement as a recycler, as a volunteer at recycling events, or as a committee member. Information can be found at [arlingtonma.gov/recycling](http://arlingtonma.gov/recycling), or use Town’s Request/Answer page. Select “Ask a Question” and choose the “Recycling” category so your question is routed to Arlington’s Recycling Coordinator.*