



THE 10Rs OF WASTE MINIMIZATION

Simple everyday
things you can do

Have you noticed that there's a lot of talk lately about sustainability? Trinidad & Tobago is one of the United Nations' member states that have embarked on a mission to meet 17 sustainable development goals by the year 2030. But what does sustainability mean and how does it affect you?

Put simply, sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It requires conservation of natural resources, protection of our natural environment and eco-systems, and wise consumption of water and energy. Sustainability means reducing our individual carbon footprints so that, collectively, we mitigate our contribution to global warming and extreme climate change.

Sustainability is a global concern but is particularly critical to small-island developing states (SIDS) such as Trinidad and Tobago. With limited land space, vulnerable eco-systems, and susceptibility to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change, SIDS also face economic challenges and dependency on imports.

The most important things each of us can do is reduce our waste generation and then dispose our reduced waste in a more responsible manner. Here are some simple everyday things you can do:

RETHINK

Rethink purchasing. Before you buy that item ask yourself: is this a need or a want? Do I already have one? Can I borrow or rent it instead? Is it going to have a negative impact on the environment when I throw it away after use?

Rethink disposable. Before you throw that item away ask yourself: Is it biodegradable? Can it be recycled, reused or repurposed? Can it be composted? Is it harmful to the environment?

Rethink food waste. Store your food properly and use it before it spoils. Avoid cooking more than you need. Buy market fresh fruits and vegetables rather than canned or frozen; it's not only healthier but there's no packaging to throw away.



REDUCE

Product packaging comprises a large percentage of our trash and includes the plastic bags given to us by merchants. Packaging can be made of paper, cardboard, metals, polystyrene, plastics ... some of these are not bio-degradable or recyclable. As far as possible, choose items that are not harmful to the environment and that are reusable or recyclable. Avoid single use plastics such as straws, plastic bags, and fast-food containers – swap these for long-term, reusable products. Buy market fresh, unpackaged fruits and vegetables.



Waste reduction also means conserving your water and electricity. Fix leaking tanks, faucets, and toilets quickly as you can lose several gallons in one day, and hundreds of gallons in one week. Use energy-saving appliances and lightbulbs at home and at your workplace.

REFUSE

Refuse simply means saying NO to the products we do not need or that are bad for our environment. Single use plastic items such as water bottles, shopping bags, fast food cups, cartons, cutlery and straws should be at the top of our refusal list. Millions of these items enter the waste-stream daily, and unfortunately, can also be found littering and polluting our land-based environment, including the drains, rivers, and waterways that lead to the sea where they harm marine animals.

REUSE

Reuse means using a product for its original purpose over and over again. Reusable water bottles, shopping bags, stainless steel straws are among the many products designed to last a long time and replace single use throwaway items.



REPURPOSE

Repurposing means using an item for something other than its original purpose. You may already be doing that when you use an empty product container to store leftovers in the refrigerator or to contain buttons, screws, and many other items. This is where cookie tins and some plastic containers can come in handy as they are water and insect proof. Before you throw a container away, consider how you can repurpose it around your house or garden.

Upcycling is another type of repurposing. Upcycling modifies a product in such a creative way that it becomes more valuable than it was originally. For example, plastic water bottles can be turned into a zippered pencil case, while old car tyres can be turned into a swing, a planter, or a cushioned seat.

Use the internet to find tons of DIY ideas for reusing, repurposing, or upcycling items that you can use at home or craft for your friends.



REGIFT

Regifting is passing on an item that is either new or in excellent condition to someone else because you do not need or want it. These items can be books, clothing, accessories, or even items that duplicate things you already own. You can wrap and give them as gifts if they are in pristine, unopened condition or donate them to charity organizations that would be happy to have them.

REPAIR

Repair means to fix or mend something so that it can be useful again. Mending clothing, shoes, handbags, and other accessories makes your favourite items last longer. Repairing items such as your phone, television, computer, and kitchen appliances is far more economical than replacing them. You not only save money, but you save these items from the waste stream.



RECYCLE

Recycling is the process of collecting and processing materials that would otherwise be thrown away as trash and turning them into new products. Common household products that you can divert for recycling include post-consumer beverage containers, i.e. glass and plastic bottles, aluminium cans, and tetra-pak cartons. You can empty and rinse (or recap) them, place all four types in one clear or transparent bag, and place them in the iCARE bin nearest to you.



You can also participate in an office recycling programme such as SWMCOL’s Workplace Waste Reduction and Recycling Programme (WRAP) or their Public Sector Recycling Programme (PSRP). These programmes target both post-consumer beverage containers and office waste paper.

REPLANT

If you regularly spend money on fruits, vegetables, and seasonings, try growing them at home instead. Most of these items can be propagated from the parts you normally throw in your trash bin. If you have limited backyard space, they can be grown in planter troughs or bins. Partnering with one or more neighbours fosters a healthy community spirit as everyone benefits from the harvest.



ROT

Composting is the controlled and accelerated rotting of food wastes. Composting at home is a simplified version that incorporates items such as shredded paper and cardboard, garden trimmings, eggshells, and vegetable and fruit cuttings from your kitchen. The result is a nutrient-rich mixture that you can add to your kitchen garden, ornamental plants, shrubs and trees.

Decomposing organic wastes at the landfills generate greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming and climate change. When composting is coupled with replanted vegetable cuttings, householders can help divert a significant quantity of the organic waste that goes to the landfills.

REMEMBER!

Implement all or some of the 10Rs described above and your disposable waste will be reduced. Remember that products advertised as ‘convenient’ are often inconvenient for our environment. If it says ‘disposable’ on the package, it usually means use once and throw away. Choose the long-term, reusable or recyclable option instead.

The power to make a difference to our health and environment is in our hands. Take that first step along the pathway to sustainability and adopt a green lifestyle. You *can* make a difference.

Visit [SWMCOL YouTube](#) to access educational 20-minute webinars on waste minimization.

