Carolina Recycling Association

FLIP YOUR SIP

A GUIDE TO CUPS

Choosing the right cup is crucial for both practicality and sustainability. Below are five popular types of cups and their key characteristics, including pros and cons of each.

Durable Cups

Material: Glass, Stainless Steel, Ceramic, or BPA-Free Plastic
Lifespan: Long (Years)
Environmental Impact: Low (Reduces waste)

Pros:
- Durable and long-lasting
- Can be used multiple times
- Reduce waste and environmental impact

Cons:
- Require regular cleaning and replacement
- Energy impacts include washing

R.Cups

Material: Polypropylene
Lifespan: Long (Years)
Environmental Impact: Low (Reduces waste)

R.Cup is a private service you can pay for that provides cups for your event, and a way for these cups to be returned/mailed back, washed, and reused again for other events.

Pros:
- Convenient
- Can be used multiple times
- Reduce waste and environmental impact
- Large ROI for businesses

Cons:
- Require regular cleaning
- Energy impacts include washing, packaging, and transportation
- Training for set up and use

Aluminum Cups

Material: Aluminum
Lifespan: Medium to Long (Reusable but can be single-use)
Environmental Impact: Moderate to High (Energy-intensive production)

Pros:
- Durable and can be reused
- 100% recyclable
- Keep beverages cool/hot

Cons:
- Significant carbon emissions during production

Biodegradable and Compostable Cups

Material: Plant-based (e.g., bioplastics like PLA, cornstarch)
Lifespan: Short (Single-use)
Environmental Impact: Low (Biodegradable and compostable)

Pros:
- Break down naturally in commercial composting facilities
- Lower CO2 impact than plastic & paper equivalents

Cons:
- Not home compostable, lack of access to commercial composting
- Can cause confusion and require additional edication

Paper Cups

Material: Paper (Often lined with a thin layer of plastic)
Lifespan: Short (Single-Use)
Environmental Impact: Moderate (Require resources to produce; limited recyclability)

Pros:
- Increasingly recyclable in the Southeast
- Sometimes compostable in commercial compost
- Low or no plastic exposure

Cons:
- While increasing, recyclability currently limited
- Contribute to deforestation
- Overall high CO2 impact

Plastic Cups

Material: Plastic (#1, #5, polystyrene, Styrofoam)
Lifespan: Short (Single-use)
Environmental Impact: High (Non-biodegradable, contribute to pollution)

Pros:
- Widely available
- Little energy to manufacture
- Accepted in some municipal recycling programs

Cons:
- Not biodegradable
- Usually not recyclable
- Contribute to plastic pollution

- **Environmentally friendly choices are essential for reducing our ecological footprint.**
- **Consider sustainable alternatives whenever possible!**
- **Costs can vary widely for each type of cup. It is important to consider cost versus benefit, and to do your research into what is available for your needs. You might be surprised; sometimes the most ecofriendly choice is also the least costly!**

CRA can help provide guidance, contact us for assistance!
877-972-0007, staff@cra-recycle.org

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