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Waste Disposal in Germany — Proper Waste Separation

Gelber Sack, Biotonne, Papiertonne, Restmüll, Glascontainer, and Sperrmüll — how waste separation works in Germany.

Deutsche Begriffe: Gelber Sack | Biotonne | Papiertonne | Restmüll | Sperrmüll | Glascontainer

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Why Waste Separation?

Germany is among the **world champions of recycling**. Waste separation is **mandatory** and is taken seriously by neighbors and landlords. Improper separation can lead to complaints and even fines.

The Containers at a Glance

Gelber Sack / Gelbe Tonne

What goes in:

- Plastic packaging (yogurt cups, foils, bags)
- Cans and aluminum trays
- Tetrapak (milk and juice cartons)
- Styrofoam packaging

What does NOT go in: Toys, coat hangers, CDs — these belong in Restmüll.

Biotonne (brown)

- Fruit and vegetable scraps

• Coffee grounds and tea bags

• Garden waste (leaves, flowers)

• Eggshells

No plastic bags in the Biotonne — not even "compostable" bags (they decompose too slowly).

Papiertonne (blue)

• Newspapers, magazines, brochures

• Cardboard boxes (break them down!)

• Letters and office paper

Not: Coated paper (baking paper), pizza boxes with grease stains, photos.

Restmüll (black/gray)

Everything that doesn't belong in any other container:

• Diapers, hygiene products

• Cigarette butts

• Broken items (dishes, mirrors)

• Vacuum cleaner bags

Glascontainer

Glass bottles and glasses are sorted by **color**:

• **Clear glass** — transparent bottles and glasses

• **Green glass** — green bottles

• **Brown glass** — brown bottles

Important: Observe deposit times — usually **not** between 8:00 PM and 7:00 AM, not on Sundays.

Sperrmüll — Large Items

Furniture, mattresses, and electrical appliances **must not** simply be placed on the street. Instead:

• **Register Sperrmüll** — with the waste management office (online or by phone)

• Free or for a small fee (depending on the city)

• A pickup date will be assigned

• Alternative: **Wertstoffhof** (recycling center) — bring it yourself

Electronic Waste

Old phones, televisions, computers do **not** belong in Restmüll:

• Drop off at **Wertstoffhof** (free of charge)

• Major retailers (Media Markt, Saturn) accept old devices

Costs

Waste disposal fees are paid through **additional costs** (approx. 15–30 €/month per household). Gelber Sack is **free of charge**.

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