

# ENVIROTALK



## **REDUCE FOOD WASTE TO SAVE MONEY AND RESOURCES**

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Fall 2024

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THE SWITCH IS ON

# Tacoma Partners with the Switch is On Washington to Promote Home Electrification

The City has partnered with The Switch is On Washington to assist residents in electrifying their homes. Initiated in 2019 by the Building Decarbonization Coalition, this effort aims to educate and simplify the transition to electric appliances. Tacoma and Pierce County are now part of this initiative, which offers homeowners and renters resources to find local contractors, rebates, and incentives.

Residents can explore options for heating and cooling systems, water heating, cooking, clothes drying, and other appliances. Recently, The Switch is On Washington participated in the 16th Annual South Sound Sustainability Expo, where they, in collaboration with Tacoma Public Utilities, presented the basics of electrification. The Expo's electrification section featured 15 local vendors, focusing on educating residents about electrification products and upcoming funding opportunities.

This initiative is an excellent resource for saving money on various electric systems and projects. The Switch is On Washington connects residents with local incentives through their utility and links them to state and federal tax credits, rebates, and other funding available through the Inflation Reduction Act.

**For more information about The Switch is On Washington and to explore their local network of resources, visit [switchison.org/switch-is-on-washington](https://switchison.org/switch-is-on-washington) or call (253) 591-5172 to connect with a member of the Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability.**

**About The Switch is On Washington:** The Switch is On Washington is an initiative by the Building Decarbonization Coalition, dedicated to making the transition to electric appliances accessible and affordable for communities in Washington. By partnering with local governments and utilities, they provide valuable resources and support to help residents electrify their homes.



# Focus on the Residential Sewer Conservation Loan Program

**The Environmental Services Department offers loans for residential sewers and stormwater conservation projects. City of Tacoma Business Services Analyst Stephanie Seivert Wilson talks more about how customers can learn more and apply for these low-interest loans.**

## What causes sewer back-ups or problems?

Sewer back-ups are often caused by blockages in your side sewer line, which connects your home or business to the City's main lines. These blockages can be due to debris, tree roots, or other obstructions. Whatever the cause, sewer back-ups can be a huge headache for homeowners and neighbors alike.

## What is the Residential Sewer Conservation Loan Program?

The first of its kind in Washington, Tacoma's Residential Sewer Conservation Loan Program covers up to 90 percent of the costs for repairing or replacing side sewers. Loan amounts range from \$1,000 to \$25,000, with an interest rate two percent below the prime rate (minimum four percent). The loan is secured through a lien on the project property, ensuring affordable access to necessary repairs.

## Who is eligible for the loan?

To qualify for the loan, homeowners must be within the Tacoma city limits and be served by the City's Environmental Services Department. You can verify this by checking your utility bill. Additionally, you must have good credit with Tacoma Public Utilities and a satisfactory FICO score. The loan is available for repairs or replacements of existing residential side sewers. New construction or projects already completed are not eligible.

## How can I apply for the loan?

To apply for the loan, first determine the cost of your project and the loan amount needed, then download the application and Credit Release Form on the City's website at [cityoftacoma.org/SewerLoan](http://cityoftacoma.org/SewerLoan). Applications must be submitted and approved before any work begins. Loan disbursement occurs only after project completion is verified by the City's Environmental Services Department.

## Who can I contact for more information?

For more information about the Residential Sewer Conservation Loan Program, refer to the fact sheet on the website or contact us at (253) 502-2255. Additionally, financial assistance may be available for replacing a leaking water service line through the Tacoma Water Grant and Loan Program. For existing loan customers with payment-related questions, such as submitting a pay-off request, requesting to increase monthly payments, or reducing payments to the monthly minimum, please email the treasury department at [loans@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:loans@cityoftacoma.org) or call (253) 591-5088.



# How to Select and Care for Houseplants

Houseplants provide more than just visual appeal to indoor spaces. They serve as natural air purifiers, absorbing toxins and emitting oxygen, helping to enhance air quality indoors. Generally, the broader the leaf, the better the purification abilities. Additionally, they promote a sense of well-being by introducing a touch of nature into indoor environments.

Plant selection and care depends on location and seasonal factors. Some considerations:

- Light requirements: natural direct vs. indirect lighting, low/ambient/bright light, grow lights
- Space needs: tabletop, floor, windowsill or shelf, hanging plants (remember heat rises)
- Proximity to heating/cooling vents, drafts, and large window surfaces

Choose houseplants that are not harmful to children or pets. Some plants recognized as good for air quality may have some level of toxicity for children or pets and need to be hanging or out of reach.

Select a pot that's the proper shape and size for your houseplant and the proposed location.

Use a quality indoor organic or all-purpose potting soil; add small rocks for drainage if there isn't a drainage hole. Add organic all-purpose fertilizer (liquid or dry granular slow release) to the soil when planting for strong root development. Avoid synthetic or crystalline fertilizers that can reduce water retention, cause nutrient imbalances, and harm soil microorganisms.

Water foliage houseplants every week and succulents every 4 to 6 weeks.

Repot houseplants every 2 to 3 years if needed or if you want more growth. Use a slightly larger pot size; many indoor plants like to be somewhat rootbound.

**For more information, watch the EnviroHouse How-To video at <http://y2u.be/ptvvc5qDn-4>. Community members can also register for upcoming EnviroHouse workshops at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops) or call (253) 573-2426.**



**Check out TAGRO Potting Soil, specially designed for container-grown plants. Visit [TAGRO.com](http://TAGRO.com) or call (253) 502-2150 to find out more about all available TAGRO products.**





## **Green Recipe:** **Roasted Sweet Potatoes, Broccoli, and Sausage Sheet Pan Meal**

Urban Green recently featured Firefighter Jasmine McLaurin with the Tacoma Fire Department to demonstrate a roasted sweet potato, broccoli, and sausage sheet pan meal. To watch this Urban Tabletop segment from episode 41, visit [cityoftacoma.org/UrbanGreen](http://cityoftacoma.org/UrbanGreen).

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### **Ingredients (serves 4):**

- 2 sweet potatoes (peeled and cubed)
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- Pepper (to taste)
- 1–14 oz. package pre-cooked sausage (cut into bite-sized pieces)
- 1 lb. broccoli (cut into bite-sized pieces)
- Salt and additional pepper (to taste)

### **Instructions:**

1. Preheat the oven to 450F and spray a sheet pan with non-stick spray.
2. Whisk together the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, garlic powder, and black pepper.
3. Put sweet potato cubes into a bowl and toss with half the oil-balsamic mixture.
4. Spread sweet potatoes out on a sheet pan and roast in the oven for 15 minutes.
5. Then add the sausage pieces to the sheet pan and roast for an additional 10 minutes.
6. Put the broccoli into the bowl and toss with the rest of the oil-balsamic mixture.
7. Carefully remove the sheet pan from the oven and turn the sausage pieces over.
8. Add broccoli pieces to the sheet pan and roast for 15 minutes more.
9. Season with a little salt and fresh-ground black pepper, and serve hot.



# Tacoma's Watershed Management Plan: Community Insights and Next Steps

Thank you to all Tacoma community members who provided insights and feedback in 2021 to inform the vision for Tacoma's first-ever Watershed Management Plan. This input helped the City better understand the most important issues relating to healthy watersheds and neighborhoods.



Key themes from the comments included:

- Lack of healthy green spaces in lower socio-economic areas
- Concerns about trash and litter from streets and highways
- Need for increased trees and shade
- Desire for clear priorities and commitments regarding healthy watersheds

Actions such as more frequent street sweeping, planting rain gardens, and replacing unneeded pavement with plants or trees can significantly improve our local watersheds. However, identifying which neighborhoods to focus on can be challenging. Thanks to community input, equity indicators, and GIS mapping, Environmental Services has created a map to prioritize certain watersheds.

Based on these mapping outcomes, the Environmental Services Watershed Planning team has drafted the Urban Waters Protection Plan, listing potential actions for priority watershed locations. They will explore actions like increased street sweeping, litter cleanups, more pet waste stations and trees, and building more regional stormwater treatment facilities. These efforts aim to protect our waterways from polluted stormwater runoff while addressing community priorities.

Please visit the Stormwater Management website at [cityoftacoma.org/stormwater](https://cityoftacoma.org/stormwater) or scan the QR code to fill out our Stormwater Community Survey and help direct the list of priority actions guiding Tacoma's Stormwater Management Program investments. Your input is also critical to the Urban Waters Protection Plan, which provides a flexible framework to respond to new pollution hotspots, community priorities, future development, housing needs, and climate change impacts.



SCAN ME

**For more information and to view the full Watershed Community Engagement Report, visit [cityoftacoma.org/healthywatersheds](https://cityoftacoma.org/healthywatersheds) or call (253) 591-5588.**



# Calendar of Events

## SEPTEMBER

- 01-30 Make a Splash Grant Applications** are open. Applications and details are available at [cityoftacoma.org/makeasplash](http://cityoftacoma.org/makeasplash) or call (253) 208-0536
- 02 Labor Day**, Curbside Collection is NORMAL
- 07 Solatube Natural Daylight & DIY Installation**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 14 Weatherize Your Home for Winter Weather**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 21 Fall-Winter Garden, Keep Growing, Winterize Beds**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 28 Gain Efficiency with Smart Home Features**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426

## OCTOBER

- 01 TAGRO Fall/Winter Hours Begin**, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 2301 Cleveland Way, Central Treatment Plant, Gate 6, call (253) 502-2150 or visit [tagro.com](http://tagro.com)
- 05 DIY Create Pollinator Seed Paper**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 12 Trees, NW Species, How to Identify**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 12 Green Tacoma Day**, from 9 a.m. to noon, this is a celebration of the Green Tacoma Partnership's work to restore urban green spaces. To learn more about the event, visit [cityoftacoma.org/greentacomaday](http://cityoftacoma.org/greentacomaday), or call (253) 325-1393
- 19 Electric Vehicles, What to Know, What's New**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 26 Save with Energy Efficient Heat Pumps**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426





# Reduce Food Waste to Save Money and Resources

The average family of four spends around \$1,600 annually on food that ends up in the trash. This wasted food ends up impacting not only household budgets, but also contributing to climate change. Around 22% of our municipal waste in landfills is food, making it the single largest contributor to landfill methane gas emissions.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies landfills as the third largest source of human-caused methane emissions, so working to prevent wasted food from ending up in landfills is an impactful way to help reduce our climate impacts.

Here are three effective strategies to help reduce wasted food and save money:



## Plan your meals

Before heading to the store, take a few minutes to plan your meals and make a list to avoid buying more than you need. Avoid unnecessary bulk purchases or deals that might lead to excess food going bad or being thrown out.



## Shop your pantry first

Check your cupboards and refrigerator for items that you already have and consume food before it goes bad. There are helpful mobile apps and websites that can help you plan meals by inputting ingredients you have on hand.



## Share extra food with others

If you end up with more food in your fridge or pantry than you need, consider donating to a local food pantry or food drive. Visit [piercecountywa.gov/foodbanks](https://www.piercecountywa.gov/foodbanks) to find a location near you.



### **Decoding Food Date Labels: Quality vs. Safety**

Understanding food date labels is essential for minimizing wasted food and ensuring consumption of products at their best quality. The “use by” and “best if used by” dates suggest the timeframe during which the product is expected to retain its peak quality, according to the manufacturer’s standards. However, these dates are not definitive indicators of food safety, except in the case of infant formula, which is strictly regulated.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) clarifies that food date labels are more about quality than safety. After these dates pass, many foods may still be safe to consume if they have been stored properly. Consumers are encouraged to use their judgment, relying on sensory cues such as smell, taste, and

appearance to determine if a food product is still good to eat. Understanding this distinction can help reduce unnecessary wasted food while maintaining safety and quality in food consumption.

More information about proper food storage can be found at [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov), where users will find a handy FoodKeeper App that provides proper handling and storage information for hundreds of foods.

Putting wasted food in the brown food/yard waste container to become compost is a better alternative than the landfill, but it is still a loss of personal money and the resources used to grow the food. The best option is to not have food waste.



Mindful approaches to purchasing and consuming food can help reduce wasted food, conserve valuable resources, and save money. By taking a few small steps, you can help contribute to a more sustainable and efficient food system. Visit [cityoftacoma.org/preventingwastedfood](https://cityoftacoma.org/preventingwastedfood) or call (253) 591-5172 to find out more.

# EnviroKids

## what's that word?

Complete the sentences below (you'll find the answers in this issue of EnviroTalk), and then find the word or phrase in the word search below. If you get stumped, the answers are at the bottom.

1. **SEWER** back-ups are often caused by \_\_\_\_\_ in your side sewer line, which connects your home or business to the City's main lines.
2. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies \_\_\_\_\_ as the third largest source of human-caused \_\_\_\_\_ emissions.
3. State law requires that anyone carrying items in a \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ must secure their load during transit by covering it with an item such as a tarp or cargo net.
4. The City of Tacoma has partnered with The Switch is On Washington to assist residents in \_\_\_\_\_ their homes.
5. Thanks to community input, equity indicators, and GIS mapping, Environmental Services has created a map to prioritize certain \_\_\_\_\_.

P	A	V	W	Z	Z	W	N	D	S	I	V	M	Y	L
R	T	S	F	X	H	D	D	D	X	L	S	G	A	Y
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K	J	H	L	F	S	G	R	C	I	F	A	R	X	K
D	R	C	Y	R	F	E	U	Y	I	N	E	I	S	R
Z	G	D	E	U	I	R	F	L	A	L	N	B	G	M
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C	A	G	R	B	R	S	L	A	B	O	M	T	G	G
W	U	N	C	T	Q	R	M	G	M	H	C	G	H	
T	X	B	C	G	I	T	E	X	I	A	C	F	M	A
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E	Q	V	F	Z	K	N	B	H	H	S	Y	K	T	X
S	E	G	A	K	C	O	L	B	I	S	L	Z	N	E

(1) SEWER, BLOCKAGES, (2) LANDFILLS, METHANE, (3) TRUCK, TRAILER, (4) ELECTRIFYING, (5) WATERSHEDS

SENIOR MARKETING AND  
COMMUNICATION ANALYST

**Leah Michaelsen**

Leah is a member of the Environmental Services Director's Office, where she helps support communication and community engagement efforts. Helping to ensure that the department's programs, services, and initiatives are communicated clearly and effectively means that Leah spends a lot of time talking to and learning from colleagues.

"I love getting to know a little bit about everything that goes on in our department. The best part of my job is getting to work with people from all parts of our organization and across other City departments to make sure we keep our community members involved and informed about the services we provide," Leah said about her job.

An associate or undergraduate degree in communication, marketing, or public relations is helpful for this kind of job. It's also important to have good written and verbal communication skills and strong interpersonal communication abilities.



MEET



## Green Tacoma Day

Celebrate Tacoma's 30 years as a Tree City USA during our Green Tacoma Day and Arbor Day festivities. On Saturday, October 12, volunteer by planting trees, removing weeds, and connecting with fellow community members passionate about Tacoma's environment. No experience needed – just enthusiasm! Tools, gloves, and training are provided across all Green Tacoma Day sites. Join the community effort to preserve our urban environment. Visit [GreenTacomaDay.org](https://Greentacomaday.org) for more details.

## Puget Sound Starts Here Month

September is Puget Sound Starts Here (PSSH) Month, a regional campaign for communities to work together to protect the Puget Sound and raise awareness of how our everyday actions impact our waterways. During this month, you can learn more about how to prevent stormwater pollution by fixing car leaks, preventing illegal dumping, picking up pet waste, building raingardens, and picking up litter. To learn more and find out what's going on near you, visit [PugetSoundStartsHere.org](https://PugetSoundStartsHere.org) or call (253) 591-5588.

## No Wipes in the Pipes

There's a persistent issue that Tacoma's wastewater treatment facilities face on a daily basis – items that don't biodegrade in the sewer system. Baby wipes and disinfecting wipes are a big issue because they don't break down or tear very easily, and even though they may say "flushable," this is not the case. Avoid drain pain and steer clear of potential issues by only flushing biodegradable items. For a list of what not to flush, visit [cityoftacoma.org/WhatNotToFlush](https://cityoftacoma.org/WhatNotToFlush) or call (253) 591-5418.

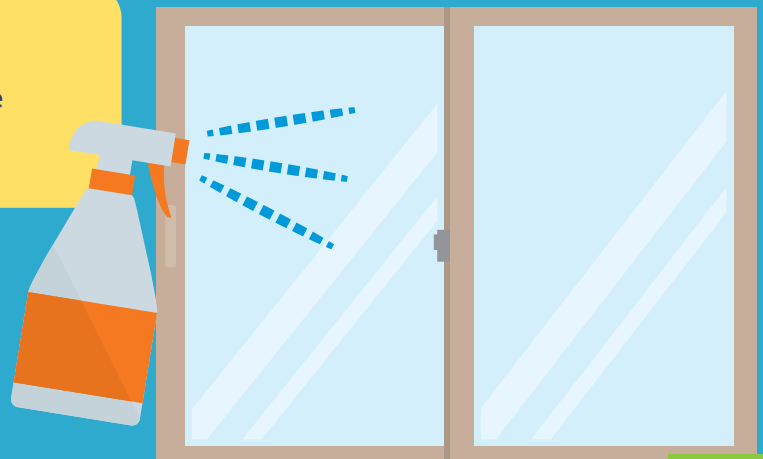
## TIP OF THE DAY

## Glass Cleaner

### Items Needed:

Club soda  
Clean 8- or 16-ounce spray bottle  
Lint-free or microfiber cloth

1. Fill the spray bottle with club soda.
2. Spritz it all over the glass.
3. Wipe away using the cleaning cloth.



# Collaboration for a Cause: Touring the Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center

In the spring, Solid Waste Management (SWM) opened the Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center doors to solid waste staff from both King County and Thurston County to share information about current operations and communications efforts with customers. On separate occasions, a total of over 20 staff from both jurisdictions met with SWM leadership for a tour of the Recycle Center, Scale House, and Main Receiving Building to discuss best practices.

King County Solid Waste Division staff were able to share information about how they have promoted the Secure Your Load for Safer Roads campaign to their customers. State law requires that anyone carrying items in a truck or trailer must secure their load during transit by covering it with an item such as a tarp or cargo net. The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness about the law, decrease litter from debris that can fall out during transport, and decrease traffic accidents from other drivers potentially swerving to avoid debris that has fallen out.

Thurston County Public Works toured the Recycle Center as they are interested in potentially launching a new collection program in collaboration with Bikes for Kids. Tacoma has participated as a collection site for over a decade for unwanted bikes that can then be passed over to Bike for Kids to refurbish for children in Pierce County that do not have a bicycle. Staff were able to share strategies regarding how to best set up the operations for safe, effective collection from residents.

For more information about the Secure Your Load for Safe Roads requirements and what it means for Tacoma customers, call (253) 502-2100.







# EnviroHouse

CITY OF TACOMA

**Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center**  
**3510 S. Mullen St.**  
**Open Thursday - Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

**cityoftacoma.org/EnviroHouse | (253) 573-2426**

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Help Prevent Street Flooding

Street flooding is often caused by debris-covered catch basins. Use a rake, broom, or blower to keep catch basin grates near your home or business clear. With over 18,000 basins, the City can't manage them all during heavy rains and needs your help. Regularly clean gutters and downspouts to redirect water away from your home and prevent flooding. If flooding persists despite a clear catch basin on your street, call (253) 591-5585. You can also help maintain catch basins in your neighborhood by "adopting" a storm drain and pledging to keep it clear and flowing. Learn more at [wa.adopt-a-drain.org](http://wa.adopt-a-drain.org).

### Street Sweeping Program

The City's Street Sweeping Program beautifies neighborhoods by regularly clearing leaves and debris. The schedule runs from January through October, with a focus on leaf season from mid-October to December. Help prevent flooding by placing leaves in your brown yard/food waste containers and keeping streets and storm drains clear. To see when sweepers will be in your area, visit [cityoftacoma.org/StreetSweeping](http://cityoftacoma.org/StreetSweeping) or call (253) 591-5585.

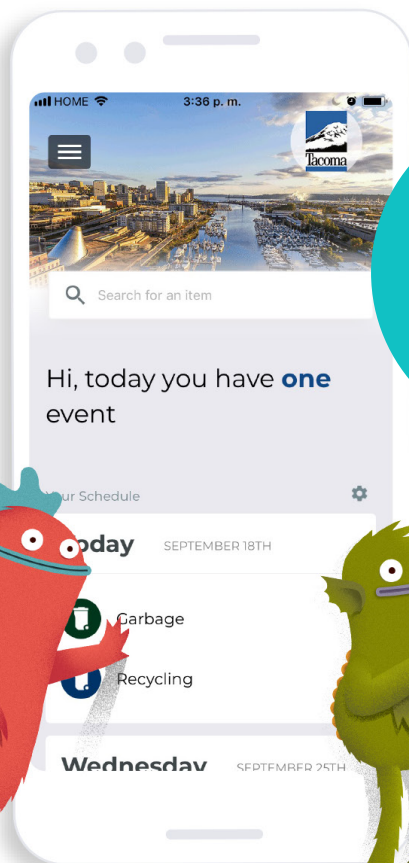
### Ground to Sound Film Festival

On March 1, 2024, Environmental Services, in collaboration with Fosters Creative and UW Tacoma, hosted the Ground to Sound Film Festival to raise awareness about stormwater pollution. The festival showcased fifteen award-winning films across three categories: youth, teen, and amateur, each presenting ways to mitigate stormwater pollution. Over 300 attendees, including community members, artists, City employees, and council members, attended the event. Watch the award-winning films online at [GroundtoSoundFilmFest.com](http://GroundtoSoundFilmFest.com).



# Waste Less and Recycle More

Confused when it comes to recycling? You're not alone. The City has partnered with Recycle Coach to provide instructions for the proper disposal of thousands of items—from plastic cups to bowling balls. Recycle Coach users can also sign up to receive collection day reminders, calendars, and instant news notifications to a mobile phone, so you never forget to put out your bin.



Now available:  
What Goes Where



## Never miss a collection again.

Download the **FREE** app on your app store today!



[tacomarecycles.org](http://tacomarecycles.org) or call (253) 502-2100 to learn more.



# Events

## Calendar of

### NOVEMBER

- 02 Pruning & Care of Fruit Trees**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 03 Daylight Savings Time Ends**
- 09 Pruning Landscape Trees**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 11 Veterans Day**, The Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center is open and curbside collection is on a regular schedule
- 16 DIY Holiday Wreaths/Herbal Table Décor**, FREE, 10 a.m., EnviroHouse, 3510 S. Mullen St., Advance Registration required at [cityoftacoma.org/workshops](http://cityoftacoma.org/workshops), or call (253) 573-2426
- 28 Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center is closed Thanksgiving Day**. Curbside collection will be one day late. Customers scheduled for Thursday collection will be picked up on Friday and Customers scheduled for Friday collection will be picked up on Saturday

### DECEMBER

- 25 City Services are Closed to observe Christmas Day**. Curbside pickup schedules for all days will be one day later than normally scheduled between Dec. 25-29
- 26 Tacoma Recycling Center**, 3510 S. Mullen St., begins to accept unflocked, undecorated Christmas trees without stands

### JANUARY

- 01 City Services are Closed to observe New Year's Day**. Curbside pickup schedules for all days will be one day later than normally scheduled between Jan. 1-5
- 13 Last day to drop off your unflocked, undecorated Christmas tree** without a stand at the Tacoma Recycle Center, 3510 S. Mullen St.



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Center for Urban Waters  
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