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Earth Action: Recycle Candy Wrappers



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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To honor Earth Day's 52 years of environmental action, Earth911 is presenting 52 Actions for the Earth. Each week through Earth Day 2023, we will share an action you can take to [invest in the Earth](#) and make your own life more sustainable. Even if you don't have a sweet tooth, you probably indulge in a few pieces of Halloween candy each year. But all those little candy wrappers add up to a [scary waste problem](#). This week, you can invest in the Earth by recycling Halloween candy wrappers.

Action: Recycle Wrappers

Wrapper Waste

There's a lot to love about Halloween, and candy lands near the top of the list for a lot of people. But Halloween candy poses a [quandary](#) for ethical consumers. You don't want to be part of the problem of [childhood obesity](#) in America or global [child slavery](#) on cacao plantations. You can offer trick-or-treaters healthier and more sustainable snacks, or even some fun alternatives to food, but completely avoiding individually wrapped, fun-sized candies in October is pretty hard; Americans buy 300,000 tons of candy and 90 million pounds of chocolate just [during Halloween week](#).

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Are you considering moving because of climate change?

- Yes
- I'm researching my options to decide
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Recycling Dilemma

You're going to have to deal with some candy wrappers in October. But you can't put candy wrappers in [the recycle bin](#). Those little plastic wrappers usually comprise multiple materials, which makes their recovery difficult and expensive. Recycling is also complicated by the fact that individual candy wrappers are a low-volume product, which adds to the technical and economic challenges of collection and recycling. Unfortunately, their small size also makes them more likely to escape the waste stream and end up in the [ocean](#) as plastic pollution. Even paper cartons like the ones containing Nerds and Milk Duds may not be recyclable either. Many of them are plastic-coated.

Holiday Opportunity

It's not cost-effective to separate the odd KitKat wrapper throughout the year from the recycling stream, but the sheer numbers of Halloween candy wrappers make it possible to bundle them. There are two mail-in recycling programs that accept source-separated candy wrappers.

TerraCycle offers both prepaid boxes and pouches. The [boxes](#) come in three sizes (the smallest is 11" x 11" x 20") with prices ranging from \$86 to \$218. The [pouches](#) are 7.5" x 10.5" and cost \$43. Rubicon's [Trick or Trash](#) boxes are the same size as a small TerraCycle box and cost \$100 for individual purchase. Neither company's option is cheap, but they do better reflect the true cost of the candy we consume. Neighbors may want to pool their resources to share a box.

Fortunately, Rubicon offers an option that doesn't put the burden of disposal costs on individual families. They offer their boxes at no charge to schools, community organizations, and businesses that want to serve as collection points. Parent groups could organize a post-holiday wrapper collection at school, or shops that participate in neighborhood trick-or-treat programs could choose to be part of the solution for free.

Act fast to receive your box in time for Halloween, and if the system works for you, consider repeating it at Easter – the only holiday that consumes [more candy](#) than Halloween.

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