



## Garbage out ...

We talked last week about the topic of garbage, and how I feel that I am pretty much free from 'guilt' about the products that I myself make. My prints are never thrown away, and will eventually - in the very very long term - simply decay quietly, without harming anyone at all.

But I certainly can't claim that I don't throw things away! I'm a fairly typical citizen of my community, and as such, contribute my share of garbage to 'feed' the trucks that come by to pick it all up.

I have learned though, and this is reinforced every time an overseas visitor stays here, that the way we handle garbage here in Japan could not be more different than the methods in place in some other countries. I think that most people have a perception of 'the Japanese' as being orderly, well organized, and generally 'obedient', and when it comes to community garbage collection, I see nothing to disabuse me of that viewpoint!

Is the garbage collection in your community 'separated' by type, or is it all just dumped in together? Here in Ome, it is separated by type, and has been for quite some time now. Off hand, I can't quite remember just how many categories we have - I'll have to use my fingers ... and some toes! ... to tabulate them all!

Twice a week, a crusher truck comes around and picks up 'Burnable Garbage', which is kind of the catch-all category consisting of kitchen waste, and smaller odds-and-ends that simply can't be recycled. They will only pick up things put out in official city bags, which we have to buy at the supermarket, thus guaranteeing that households 'pay as you go' - the more you dispose, the more you pay. This garbage is incinerated, in a very high-tech facility with 'scrubbed' exhaust.

Once a week is the 'Recyclable Plastics' category (with its own colour-coded bag). This is for anything made of plastic that is branded (or printed) with the symbol that lets us know it can be recycled, which includes nearly all plastic packaging. This category makes up by far the largest volume that I see out on the street waiting for pickup.

Once every two weeks is 'Bottle Day', where we put out glass containers. On the same day, they also pick up 'Pet Bottles', and we have to put those out in a separate pile, so that they can be kept apart in the truck. Then, on the same day of the week on the alternate weeks, it's 'Can Day'. There is no way that I can miss either of these days, because the neighbourhood resounds with the noise of large bags of cans or bottles being plunked down at curbside.

Then we have the once-a-month special days, one each for: newspapers, cardboard, magazines, milk cartons, old clothes, and 'scrap paper'. Also on the calendar is 'Dangerous stuff' day, when we put out light bulbs, old batteries, gas canisters, and things like that.

Let's see, what have I forgotten ... oh yes, there is a special day once a month for the 'Catch-all' category for non-recyclable, non-burnable stuff. Old saucepans, shoes, broken clocks, utensils, broken china, etc. etc. This also needs a special bag, and those are not cheap, either.

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That's pretty much it for curbside garbage collection here in Ome, but there are still more categories listed in the 62-page 'Guide to Your Garbage' (including an indispensable pin-up wall calendar) that is issued annually by City Hall. They won't pick up styrofoam trays - these must be taken back to the supermarkets - and they won't take appliances on a certain list - TVs, air conditioners, fridges, etc. - which must be returned to the manufacturers. But they will take other large items such as old furniture, bicycles, mattresses; to dispose of these we must call to make an appointment for pickup, and they will charge us for each item at that time.

All in all, I think it's a very fair system, and it seems to me that pretty much everything that *can* be recycled is getting recycled. It is sometimes a bit troublesome to separate this stuff into the different categories, and it is *certainly* troublesome to find somewhere to keep it all while waiting for the appropriate pickup day (especially in a tiny Japanese house).

But when my American friends hear these details of the rules we must all follow here, they just shake their heads.

No. Way.

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