

Waste-Free Lunch

Situation: As Americans we have come to depend on many convenience products, and nowhere is this more evident than in the school lunch room. Much of the trash we generate comes from food packaging. On average, a school-age child using a disposable lunch generates 67 pounds of waste per school year. That equates to over 30,000 pounds of lunch waste for just one average-size middle school.

Your school is having a waste-free lunch day. Students are required to bring their own lunch. Everything in a waste-free lunch is edible, reusable, recyclable or compostable. *Which lunch choice will produce the least amount of waste?*

Choice #1



- Paper lunch bag.
- Sandwich wrapped in aluminum foil.
- Raw carrots in a reusable, washable container.
- Pudding in a reusable, washable container.
- Plastic disposable spoon.
- Whole piece of fruit, such as a banana.
- Juice in a single-serving plastic bottle.

Choice #2



- Reusable, washable lunchbox/bag.
- Sandwich in a reusable, washable container.
- Raw carrots in a reusable, washable container.
- Pudding in a single-serving metal can.
- Metal spoon.
- Whole piece of fruit, such as an apple.
- Juice in a reusable, washable container.

Choice #3



- Paper lunch bag.
- Sandwich wrapped in aluminum foil.
- Raw carrots in a plastic zipper-lock baggie.
- Cookies purchased in individual packages.
- Mixed fruit pieces in single-serving plastic cup.
- Plastic disposable spoon.
- Juice in juice box.

Choice #4

- Paper lunch bag.
- Sandwich wrapped in plastic wrap.
- Raw carrots in single-serving plastic wrapping.
- Cookies in a plastic zipper-lock baggie.
- Mixed fruit in a single-serving metal can.
- Metal spoon.
- Juice in an aluminum can.



Answers

Best choice: #2

Everything can be eaten, reused, recycled or composted.

Second choice: #1

The lunch bag and washed aluminum foil can be reused or recycled. The metal can is recyclable. The plastic spoon and bottle can be cleaned and reused a limited number of times but only the plastic bottle can be recycled.

Third choice: #4

The plastic wrap cannot be reused or recycled. The plastic zipper-lock baggie can be cleaned and reused a limited number of times but cannot be recycled. The metal and aluminum cans are recyclable.

Fourth choice: #3

The cookie packaging, plastic fruit cup and juice box cannot be reused or recycled. The plastic spoon can be cleaned and reused a limited number of times but cannot be recycled.

Placing: 2-1-4-3

Cuts: 2-3-4

Explanation

- The use of durable rather than disposable items reduces pollution, conserves natural resources, and saves energy.
- Reusing items is better than recycling them as recycling requires collection and remanufacturing.
- Recycling is better than disposal as the recycled material can be used to make new products.
- Composting food scraps and leftovers makes fertile soil out of waste.
- Brown paper bags can be reused and usually recycled in communities that recycle mixed paper.
- Plastic utensils, baggies, cups, and juice boxes *cannot* be recycled in Oklahoma. Communities that accept plastic recycle #1 or #2 plastic bottles or jars only (e.g., water bottles, milk jugs, peanut butter jars).
- Some plastic items, such as utensils, baggies, drink cups and containers with lids (e.g., margarine tubs) occasionally may be washed and reused; however, this is not recommended because hot water will eventually degrade these plastics and may release chemicals.
- Aluminum foil can occasionally be recycled with aluminum cans if the foil is not soiled by food. All metal containers can be recycled.

Answer Key Details

Choice #1 (17 points)

- Paper lunch bag: ♻️ △ ◇
- Sandwich wrapped in aluminum foil: △ ◇
- Raw carrots in a reusable, washable container: ♻️
- Pudding in a reusable, washable container: ♻️
- Plastic disposable spoon: ◇
- Whole piece of fruit, such as a banana: ♻️
- Juice in a single-serving plastic bottle: △ ◇

Choice #2 (25 points)

- Reusable, washable lunchbox/bag: ♻️
- Sandwich in a reusable, washable container: ♻️
- Raw carrots in a reusable, washable container: ♻️
- Pudding in a single-serving metal can: △
- Metal spoon: ♻️
- Whole piece of fruit, such as an apple: ♻️
- Juice in a reusable, washable container: ♻️

Choice #3 (5 points)

- Paper lunch bag: ♻️ △ ◇
- Sandwich wrapped in aluminum foil: ◇
- Raw carrots in a plastic zipper-lock baggie: ◇
- Cookies purchased in individual packages: ∅
- Mixed fruit pieces in single-serving plastic cup: ∅
- Plastic disposable spoon: ◇
- Juice in juice box: ∅

Choice #4 (11 points)

- Paper lunch bag: ♻️ △ ◇
- Sandwich wrapped in plastic wrap: ∅
- Raw carrots in single-serving plastic wrapping: ∅
- Cookies in a plastic zipper-lock baggie: ◇
- Mixed fruit in a single-serving metal can: △
- Metal spoon: ♻️
- Juice in an aluminum can: △

Points Key:

- ♻️ Reusable many times = 4 points; ♻️ Compostable = 3 points; △ Recyclable = 2 points;
◇ Limited reuse = 1 point; ∅ Cannot reuse, recycle or compost = 0 points.