

The Catalyst

Activating TN's Sustainable and Resilient Future

Office of Sustainable Practices



Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award



The Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards (GESA) are Tennessee's highest honors for environmental and conservation leadership. Presented annually by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), with support from the Governor's Office, these awards recognize individuals, organizations, and communities making a lasting impact on our natural resources.

This September, we proudly celebrated 39 years of honoring achievements in areas such as land reclamation, sustainable development, and lifetime contributions to environmental stewardship.

One of this year's most distinguished honorees is Ernest Howard Whitaker, recipient of the Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award. With over 70 years of service, Whitaker has inspired generations through environmental education and community engagement. He is best known for creating Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop, mascots used by the USDA to teach children about conservation. Whitaker's legacy spans the nation, but his roots and impact are especially strong in Tennessee. His work exemplifies the spirit of GESA—volunteerism, innovation, and leadership by example.

GESA continues to raise awareness of effective environmental practices and encourages others to follow suit. Award recipients help preserve Tennessee's air, water, soil, forests, and wildlife while supporting broader goals like economic development and public health.

The next GESA application period opens in late December 2025. We encourage all eligible individuals and organizations to apply and share their stories of environmental stewardship.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT GESA](#)

Celebrating Tennessee's Zero Waste Day

Every year on October 27th, Tennessee celebrates Zero Waste Day to encourage sustainable living and reduce environmental impact. This initiative highlights the critical need to minimize landfill waste by promoting the "3 Rs": reduce, reuse, and recycle.

It's an opportunity for everyone, from individuals to businesses, to re-evaluate their consumption habits, shift their mindset from waste disposal to waste prevention, and take meaningful steps toward a more sustainable future. This helps conserve natural resources, decrease pollution, and support a more circular economy.



Getting involved is simple. Start at home by adopting small changes like using reusable bags and bottles,

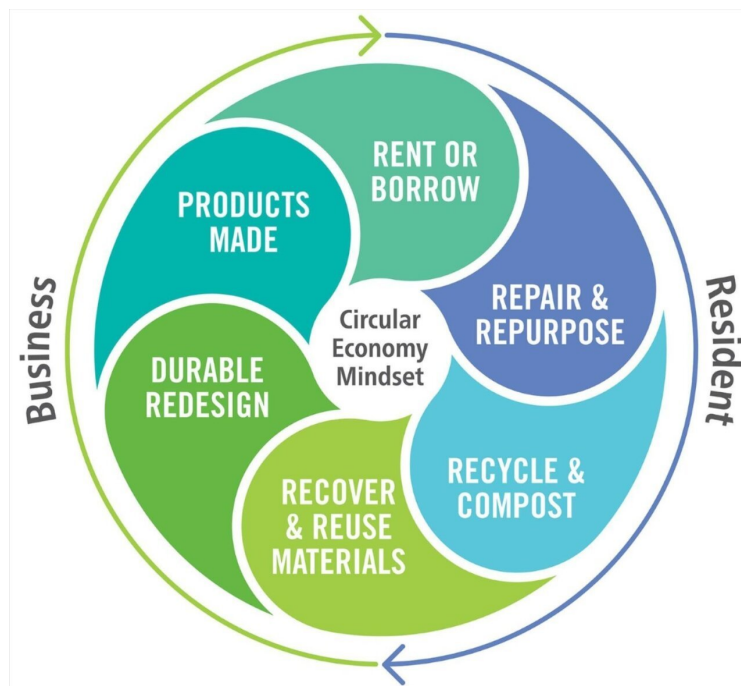
composting food scraps, and repairing items rather than throwing them away. Businesses can contribute by auditing their waste and implementing strategies to cut down on their output. Many local communities also host events and workshops to educate the public and provide resources for proper recycling.

[FIND A LOCAL RECYLING DROP-OFF](#)

Participating in the Circular Economy

The circular economy is a system that reduces waste by keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible. Instead of the traditional “take-make-waste” model, it focuses on reusing, repairing, recycling, and designing products to last. This approach helps conserve resources, reduce pollution, and support a more sustainable Tennessee.

Consumers can take part by choosing reusable items, repairing instead of replacing them, shopping secondhand, and supporting businesses that prioritize sustainability.



Are you a business, community leader, or innovator in West Tennessee? Consider attending the [Circular Mid-South Summit](#) to come together and create real solutions for a circular economy that drives economic opportunity, innovation, and equity in Memphis and the Mid-South. Businesses and manufacturers interested in taking further action can also contact the [Tennessee Pollution Prevention Program](#) for technical assistance and training.

Tennessee Cities Adopting Composting



Exciting things are happening in east Tennessee in the fight against food waste! Both Knoxville and Chattanooga have city supported composting initiatives in place, but each with a different model.

The [Knoxville Compost Project](#) started in 2022 from a single drop-off site and has grown into a network that's diverted over 28 tons of food waste to local farms, without an industrial composting facility. Meanwhile, [Chattanooga's Composting Pilot Program](#) began on October 1st, offering both [curbside](#) and [drop-off](#) options through a partnership with [NewTerra Compost](#). These two models are paving the way for composting in Tennessee and demonstrate that a variety of approaches are possible, as long as there's strong community support.

Want to stay in the loop on food waste solutions across the state? [Subscribe to the Get Food Smart TN Quarterly Newsletter](#) for updates, resources, and success stories! Read the [Fall Edition of the Get Food Smart TN Quarterly Newsletter](#).

Small Business Environmental Assistance Program



The [Office of Sustainable Practices](#) houses the Small Business Environmental Assistance Program. This program is designed to help small businesses with environmental compliance. The program can assist small businesses with 100 or fewer employees and doesn't produce a lot of air emissions or hazardous waste. Environmental compliance can feel overwhelming, but the program has an extensive amount of information on the [SBEAP website](#) help you get started. You can watch this [introductory video](#) on what the program is and how it can help your small business. The program sends out a [quarterly newsletter](#), which contains environmental information relevant to small businesses. Environmental information is shared weekly through the TN Small Business Environmental Assistance Program's [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#) accounts, so make sure to follow the program's social media to keep up to date! To contact the program directly, call (800) 734-3619 or email BGSBEAP@tn.gov.

Sustainable Recipe

Fall in Tennessee brings an abundance of apples, and sometimes that means bringing home more than you can use. If you have bruised or aging apples, don't throw them out—try making a batch of tasty [apple cookies](#) instead.

To keep apples fresh longer, store them in a breathable bag in your refrigerator's low-humidity drawer. Once sliced, place them in an airtight container with a splash of lemon juice to help prevent browning. [Learn more about how to store apples.](#)



News Articles

[City of Chattanooga Launches Pilot Program to Divert Food and Glass Waste from Landfills](#)

[The Knoxville Compost Project: A Potential Model for Tennessee Cities](#)

[Whitaker Named Lifetime Achievement Award Winner for Environmental Stewardship](#)

[TVA and Type One Energy Accelerate Fusion Commercialization in Tennessee - Type One Energy](#)

Get Involved

Volunteer

[The Giving Grove Community Orchard](#)
Nashville

[Keep Tennessee Beautiful Clean Ups](#)
Statewide

[Nobody Trashes Tennessee Clean Ups](#)
Statewide

Conferences

[Clean Memphis Circular Summit](#)
Memphis
October 22

[Tennessee Biodiversity Summit](#)
Murfreesboro
October 22

[Tennessee Local Food Summit](#)
Nashville
December 5-7

Events

[Materials Recovery Facility Tours](#)
Memphis

[TN Zero Waste Day](#)
Statewide

Receive Funding

[Keep Tennessee Beautiful Law Enforcement Grant](#)

[TDOT Litter Grant Program](#)

[TDEC Grants and Programs](#)

[Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#)

[Grants.gov](#)

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