

Best Practices for Trail Waste

Leave No (Fruit) Trace

Pack it in, pack it out.
No exceptions for
“natural” stuff

Pro Tip:

Bring a **resealable bag** or **old snack wrapper** to carry out peels and paper
Yes, even tissues!



Dog poop bags work great for this - **clean, sealed, easy to toss** later

Wildlife impact alert!

When animals find human food or waste, it **can change their behavior**

They may start **frequenting trails, relying on scraps, or losing their natural fear of people** - none of which is good for them or for us

Respect the land
Be a good guest

“It Doesn’t Do What You Think It Does”

It’s natural, right?

Why You Shouldn’t Toss That Banana Peel on the Trail



It’ll break down eventually...
But not here, and not anytime soon

In Arizona’s desert climate, organic litter like fruit peels and tissue paper can **last for years** before decomposing - if they ever do

This brochure breaks down (pun intended) what’s really happening when you leave these behind



Maricopa County Parks Chapter

It’s not dirt like you’re used to

Desert ecosystems are **fragile** and **slow to recover**. Your “natural” trash can **stick around** for years - **unnatural** and **out of place**

What’s Up With Desert Soil?

Cryptobiotic soil crust is a **living layer** made up of **algae, moss, fungi,** and **bacteria**. It holds soil together, retains moisture, and prevents erosion. But it’s **extremely fragile**

Thin topsoil **Harsh climate**

Often just a few inches deep & **easily disturbed**

High heat, cold nights, and little moisture means **very slow decomposition**

Little microbial activity **Low organic matter**

Bacteria and **fungi** that break down waste are **scarce** due to **dryness**

Not many **leaves, plants, or animal remains** to fuel decay

Orange Rinds & Citrus Waste

“It’s just a little piece of fruit!”

Not to the desert

Truth:

Citrus rinds are **tough** and **oily**, taking **1-2 years** to **degrade!**



In dry conditions, **they don’t rot...** they **petrify**

Bonus problem:

Citrus oil can alter the **soil chemistry** and disrupt **local insect** and **microbe communities**

What you leave behind doesn’t stay harmless

“It’s compostable!”

Maybe in your backyard
NOT on the desert trail

Banana Peels & Apple Cores

Banana peels can take up to **2 years** to decompose in **arid environments**



Apple cores dry out quickly and **sit on the ground** for **months**, or become **mummified by the sun**



Why?

The desert **lacks** the **moisture** and **microbial life** to break these down

Learn More:

- Arizona Master Naturalist: azmnmcp.org/
- Leave No Trace Center. [Trash Your Trash. Int.org](http://TrashYourTrash.Int.org)
- National Park Service. [Leave No Trace: Trash Your Trash. nps.gov](http://LeaveNoTrace.org)
- USDA NRCS. [Soil Health in the Southwest. nrcs.usda.gov](http://SoilHealthintheSouthwest.nrcs.usda.gov)
- University of Arizona Extension. [Soils of Arizona. extension.arizona.edu](http://SoilsOfArizona.extension.arizona.edu)
- AZ State Parks. [Responsible Recreation Tips. azstateparks.com](http://ResponsibleRecreationTips.azstateparks.com)



Tissue Paper & “Biodegradable” Trash

“But it’s biodegradable...”

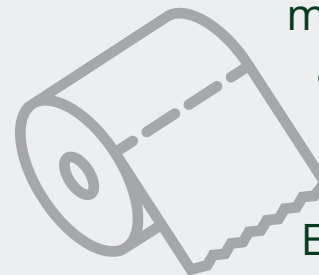
Not in the way you think.

Tissues, wipes, and napkins can remain for **months** or **years**, **blowing apart** and **littering the landscape**

Pro Tip:

Pack it out like everything else!

“Biodegradable” means **eventually** & **only** under the **right conditions**



Even **toilet paper** takes **far longer** to **vanish** in desert soil **than you’d expect**