

The New York Times | <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/13/nyregion/new-york-city-trash-cans.html>

Behold: New York City's Trash Can of the Future

Generations in the making, the new, sleeker receptacles will soon replace the iconic green mesh bins.



By David Dee Delgado

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Coming to a street corner near you: a sleek new litter basket, the latest weapon in New York City's generations-long war on trash.

The new receptacle, which will replace the green wire mesh litter baskets seen across the city, has three parts: a concrete base (so it's tough to tip over); a hinged metal lid; and a removable, relatively lightweight plastic basket that sanitation workers will lift and empty.

"The wire litter baskets are iconic, but they are well past their useful life in New York City," said Jessica Tisch, the city's sanitation commissioner. "They are vestiges of a different time."

Ms. Tisch noted that the wire baskets were made up of a series of holes: "That's the fundamental design feature which allows the rats to get in them," she said.

"The one thing that actually no one wants to see is all the trash," she added. "So why are they mesh in 2023? It doesn't make sense."

The new trash cans, alongside efforts to require certain residences and businesses to put their garbage on the streets in containers and to mandate composting (not to mention hiring a "rat czar"), are part of a broad push to clean up the city — an undertaking that also includes using social media to scold businesses that have not complied with the new rules.

"First we are issuing warnings for certain cases of people or businesses not following new rules," Ms. Tisch said. "But if we have to call you out, we also will."

There are 22,000 litter baskets on the streets of New York City and the plan is, over time, to replace all of them with what Ms. Tisch calls "this new, more modern litter basket of the future."



Some consider the soon-to-be-replaced green mesh litter basket an iconic design. David Dee Delgado for The New York Times

It is not the first time New York City has attempted to revolutionize street trash.

The city held a litter basket design contest in 1930 and stated that the baskets "would serve as the emblem of their work for outdoor cleanliness and would tend to make every citizen 'litter conscious.'"

In 1951, the city experimented with wire mesh baskets — and in 1956, a giant wire wastebasket was placed in Times Square. It was regularly filled with detritus swept from the street, and a sign affixed to the monster bin spoke directly to New Yorkers: "THIS LITTER BELONGS TO YOU."

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Litter baskets were painted various colors in 1966, an attempt to give them some "sex appeal." But the metal baskets proved too appealing: A 1978 Times article reported that 5,000 litter baskets were stolen every year.

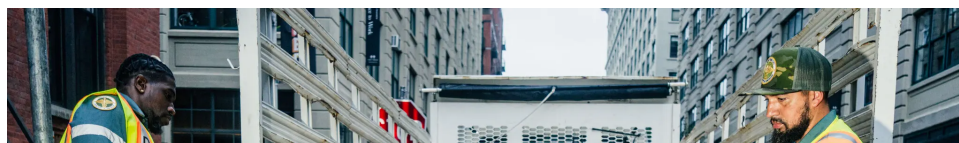
The city experimented with harder-to-steal 470-pound concrete containers with advertising on the sides, but the plan was a failure (the liners got stolen, the opening was too small and the locks were broken) — so wire baskets returned.

Decades later, in 2002, the city put out newer, lighter wire models, and the green mesh Corcraft baskets became emblematic of New York.

The new 2023 basket started with a design competition, launched in 2018. A winner was announced in 2019. "And then basically in the four years since, nothing really happened," Ms. Tisch said.

(Actually, two major things happened: The coronavirus pandemic arrived, and the former mayor, Bill de Blasio, left after a new mayor, Eric Adams, took office.)

Eventually, the Department of Sanitation tweaked the design from the contest, making the basket bigger, adding a coating of graffiti-resistant paint, and moving the perforations up higher to deter rats.





While the wire mesh trash cans weigh 33 pounds each, the "litter basket of the future" has a molded plastic basket that is about half that weight. That is the part sanitation workers will lift and empty. Jutharat Pinyodoonyachet for The New York Times

Just 300 baskets are in the first phase of the replacement plan, but another thousand are on the way. The city will order more in the months to come.

In addition to being lighter, the new bins are easier to store and transport, explained Greg Anderson, the sanitation department's deputy commissioner for policy and strategic initiatives.

For events like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade or the New York City Marathon, corner litter baskets are removed for security reasons. Only 30 of the old wire baskets fit on a truck, but the new ones are stackable: 120 per truck. "It makes the operation much more efficient," Mr. Anderson said.

Not everyone is happy to see the green mesh litter baskets disappear.

"I will be a bit sad to see them go," Micah Belamarich, 38, the co-founder and creative director of OnlyNY, wrote in an email. The company, an independent clothing brand offering New York City-inspired apparel, sells a tiny version of the green mesh litter basket that can be used as a pen holder. It is one of the company's top-selling products.

Mr. Belamarich, who was born and raised in Morningside Heights, added that the mesh basket's design "feels timeless and nostalgic at the same time."

Still, on a recent Monday morning on Washington Street in Brooklyn, Norm Yun, 50, was out walking his chocolate lab, Soonie, when he saw the new trash receptacles as a photographer hovered around them, shutter snapping.

Mr. Yun called the new baskets "beautiful, gorgeous, amazing," and said "it was about time" the mesh baskets were replaced. "Not for nothing, but those green things were a little old."

Dodai Stewart is a writer on the Metro desk. She has lived in New York City since she was 7 years old. More about Dodai Stewart

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