

Sustainable Online Shopping in Europe



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Many of us enjoy shopping online from a variety of European e-tailers and there are certainly many advantages to it: attractive prices, quick ordering, delivery in record time (even from another country), 14 days' no-hassle returns, and guarantees for defective products. All this and more is what drives more and more European consumers to buy online in 2022.

But is it possible to reconcile online shopping with environmental protection? What is the environmental impact of our online purchases? Where do the products come from? What is the rate of CO₂ emissions generated by product returns or express deliveries? What can we do about packaging – including overpackaging of online purchases –, estimated to represent almost a third of all household waste worldwide? What should we do with items we no longer need?

This guide will provide tips on how to find eco-friendly products online, limit the impact of their delivery, avoid order returns, and how to repair and recycle your products in order to support the environment. Our glossary will help you navigate the sustainability jargon and help you buy environmentally friendly products online within Europe.

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#1

**What is an
eco-friendly
product?**

Sustainable consumption means choosing products responsibly, with the environment in mind. Eco-friendly products have a lower impact on the environment throughout their life cycle, i.e., from the raw materials used in their manufacturing, to their design, transport to the end-user, their length of use and their capacity to be recycled.

There is no set standard in Europe of what makes an eco-friendly product, but here are some criteria which can help identify products that, though sometimes more expensive, are likely to be more sustainable and will save you money in the long run.

Natural-Origin Products

Eco-friendly products made using natural materials and ingredients are better than those manufactured using plastics and synthetic materials, and/or chemicals and dangerous substances.

Examples: toys made entirely of wood, clothes made of linen, hemp, wool, etc.

Note: While natural products are best, miles matter.
It doesn't make much sense to buy something that is 100% natural if the product is shipped from the other side of the world, generating significant CO₂ emissions to reach its buyer. Sometimes it is better to buy a recycled product locally.

In terms of agricultural production processes, an organic product guarantees a high level of biodiversity and environmental practices that preserve natural resources and animal welfare.

Energy-Efficient Products

A green product generates less CO₂ emissions (the main greenhouse gas responsible for global warming) and/or less water and energy to manufacture.

Examples: solar cooker, solar oven.

Sometimes it is hard to tell which are the best products to buy, however. For example, cotton, widely used in clothes manufacturing, requires more water and fertiliser than flax or hemp.

A complex manufacturing process is almost always not energy efficient. Which is why some European manufacturers are moving towards 'low-tech' products that use less energy.

Durable Products

Sustainability is also measured in the length of time products are used before they reach the end of their life cycle and whether they can be re-used, repaired or repurposed. *Examples: rechargeable batteries, toothbrushes with replaceable heads, microfibre cloths.*

Repairability is one of the most important features of a sustainable product. Single-use, short shelf-life products have created a throw-away culture that makes replacement easier and cheaper than repair. Built-in obsolescence in tech products is also a problem in our society.

If we are to make more climate-friendly products, repairability should be one of the main aims in design and manufacturing. A green product should be easy to repair, and spare parts for replacement should be easily available.

France is the first European country to impose a [reparability index](#) for household appliances and electronic products, with other categories to follow.



Local Products

To reduce your climate footprint, it is best to buy furniture or appliances made and sold in France or Europe, or at least made from materials sourced in Europe. This is because transport is the second major factor in greenhouse gas emissions after energy and electricity use.

Product origin is not always clear. Some retailers use the French or European Union emblems on their websites but the products may come from further afar. Check the real origin of the products before clicking to buy or walk away if the information is unclear.

Ethical and Fair-Trade Products

A fair-trade product is produced in a significantly shorter time and within a more transparent supply and trade chain, all of which allows small source producers to make a decent living from their work.

An ethical product takes into account the working conditions in which the product was designed and distributed. Fair trade is not only about food, such as coffee and chocolate, but also about textiles, furniture, jewellery and decorative items for example.



#2

**How to find
eco-friendly
products online?**

Search and Save

A trivial thing such as using the right search engine could help save the planet. Most of us have never considered that our choice of search engine could actually have an impact on the environment.

Note: These search engines are not designed to find eco-friendly products but every click sponsors a cause.

We are well used to Google, Bing and others, but in recent years, Internet users concerned about the state of the planet have been using alternative search engines which also help finance environmental projects all over the world.

Example: a German search engine is committed to financing actions for the planet (reforestation operations, investments in agroforestry systems, etc.).

There are now many types of search engines that aim to do more than just search for goods stuff. They are committed to do social good and search to save the planet. They are known as 'green search', 'solidarity search' or 'socially conscious' search engines.

A 'green' engine moves away from high-energy, high-functionality features responsible for intensive energy and electricity use. 'Transparent' search engines do not have monitoring and user tracking systems that overload browsers and retain user data for marketing purposes. A 'solidarity' search engine turns every search into a benefit for the environment by financing humanitarian or environmental actions all over the world.

Note: If you want to know exactly where your click goes, check the charity partners and affiliates of the particular social solidarity engine you wish to use.



Look for the eco-label

Eco-labels and 'green stickers' are certification systems used for food and consumer products, particularly in regions such as the European Union, where the EU Ecolabel of environmental excellence has been in use since the early 90s.

Note: The use of ecolabels is voluntary, whereas green stickers are mandated by law.

Eco-labels can help identify environmentally friendly products, based on precise certification criteria. Essentially, they guarantee that products and services carrying the label meet criteria aimed at reducing their environmental footprint throughout their life cycle, while remaining energy efficient overall. The absence of an eco-label on a product does not mean that it is not environmentally responsible, but an eco-label on a product can be a real guarantee of sustainability.

Note: Eco-labels should not be confused with energy labels, for items such as household appliances in the EU for example. Eco-label measures the life cycle energy efficiency while energy rating labels refer to energy consumption during the use of an appliance.





Eco-Labels in the EU

The EU Ecolabel



The European Ecolabel ([ecolabel.eu](https://www.ecolabel.eu)), created in 1992 by the European Commission, is the only official European eco-label recognised in all European Union Member States. It is only awarded to products and services that meet strict environmental standards throughout their life cycle: from sourcing raw materials, to the production process, distribution chain and disposal method. It works by encouraging suppliers and manufacturers to use processes that generate less waste and CO₂ emissions to develop products that are durable, easy to repair and recycle.

In 2022, the label covers more than [80,000 product references across 23 categories](#). *Example: European Ecolabel wall paints contain 10 times less harmful substances than conventional products.*

In France, the European ecolabel is managed by the Agency for Ecological Transition ([ADEME](#)) and the French Association for Standardisation ([AFNOR](#)).



The Nordic Ecolabelling



Established in 1989, [Nordic Ecolabelling](#), also known as the Nordic Swan, is the official eco-label of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). It works by setting strict environmental requirements across all the phases of a product's life cycle and currently certifies 55 product groups and more than 25,000 products according to strict criteria that take into account important environmental aspects such as the use of sustainable raw materials and biodiversity, the circular economy and resource efficiency, energy use and climate impact, and avoidance of harmful chemicals, nano- and microplastics in manufacturing.

The Blue Angel



The Blue Angel ([Blauer Engel](#)) is a label created by the Federal Environment Agency in Germany. It certifies products based on strict criteria such as ecological processes and environmental impact. The testing and certification criteria are developed by the German Environment Agency on a scientific basis and it currently manages a database of 20,000 products from 1,600 companies.



Many eco-labels in Europe cover high-volume, high-use consumer products that people tend to use every day, such as food products, hygiene articles, computers, textiles, furniture, paints, etc. Every European Union Member State has regulatory authorities and public organisations that work with both manufacturers and consumers, across all the sectors of the economy but also in specific fields, such as below.

Examples :

- *In France, the main source of information on eco-labels is the website of the Agency for Energy Transition (ADEME).*
- *In Germany, the «Siegelklarheit» platform of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development aims at making labels understandable to consumers.*
- *A German NGO certifies wood and paper products sourced from managed forests or plantations, taking into account social, economic, ecological and cultural aspects.*
- *In Italy, an eco-label sets specific standards assessing the overall sustainability of the activity of companies in the wine sector.*

In addition to eco-labels and public sector guidelines, various associations or tech applications can help consumers reduce their environmental footprint and take eco-responsible action.

Example: Dutch organisation [Milieu Centraal](#) advises on sustainable consumption choices.



Organic Products Labels

If you buy organic products online, look out for the following label.



The [EU Organic Logo](#) is the Europe-wide label for products that comply with organic farming specifications and it is mandatory for all products sold as 'organic,' meaning they contain at least 95% organic ingredients. It must be accompanied by an indication of origin and the certification body details. In each Member State of the European Union, both national and private logos may be used for the labelling, presentation and advertising of organic products.

Example: these are the national labels for France and Germany.



The French [Agriculture Biologique](#) label by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food certifies that a product contains at least 95% certified-organic agricultural ingredients. Note that it is optional.



Green or just greenwashing?

Greenwashing is when a manufacturer, seller, website or brand projects a respectable environmentally-friendly image but in fact fools consumers into believing the products are ecological. There are many ways advertisements can deceive consumers. Remember not all products displaying a green sticker and environmental protection messaging is in fact organic or ecological. Deceptive commercial practices such as greenwashing constitute false advertising in some countries, like for example in France since the entry into force of the [Climate and Resilience Law](#).

A 2021 [European Commission](#) screening found that just under half of environmental claims by various European websites investigated were not supported by evidence and may mislead consumers. A [legislative initiative](#) that will require European companies to substantiate the environmental credentials of their products is under way.



How to spot greenwashing practices

Questionable labels

Some sellers or service providers use questionable certifications in a misleading way. If you want to ensure that you are buying a 'green' product, check the official website of the label or certification body listed. Only labels that comply with the international standard [ISO 14024](#) are genuine.

100% Green products

If you choose products based on their claiming to be 100% 'green origin', you may want to investigate further, particularly when it comes to cosmetic and personal hygiene products (more information on this category of products



can be found [here](#)).

To make an informed choice, you may wish to learn more about a product's ingredients, staying away from those known to be controversial or harmful. Check a brand's entire range to see if their environmental credentials are consistent across all of their products. This can often reveal a brand's real commitment to environmental protection practices.

See for example https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/cosmetics_en.

Misleading terminology

- Many retailers and brands use the terms '**sustainable**' or '**natural**' to reassure consumers that a product is '**green**'. They sometimes display 'green origin' figures or percentages without any real foundation.
- Others claim that a product is '**biodegradable**' even though the product itself it is over-packaged or packaged in polluting, hard-to-recycle materials.
- '**Eco-design**' is another term that is misused when it comes to information on appliances, for example. Eco-design requirements are regulated by [European Union law](#) for many electrical appliances. There are strict requirements that allow manufacturers to market products claiming to have a high environmental performance so as to enable end-consumers to identify energy-efficient products. The rules on labelling for energy efficiency can be checked on this European Commission [database](#).

The latest terms in use are '**carbon-neutral**', '**zero-net emissions**' and '**negative carbon footprint**'. Carbon-neutral product labels are proliferating but it is unclear what consumers make of these. Carbon neutrality when it comes to production and manufacturing overall means that any CO₂ released into the



atmosphere is balanced by an equivalent amount being removed. In essence, in order to become carbon-neutral, companies must drastically reduce carbon emissions to net-zero or balance their emissions in the manufacturing of products through the process of **carbon offsetting**, which means purchasing **carbon credits**. You can find out more about the EU carbon neutrality efforts [here](#).

If this sounds reassuring, it is however difficult for a consumer to ascertain how this balance between emissions and offsetting is calculated in real terms. Sometimes, offsetting means keeping polluting manufacturing processes unchanged and buying credits (such as for planting trees) for environmental protection elsewhere. Learn more about how to make sustainable choices [here](#).

Code 'Green'

One of the easiest ways for a website to give the impression on 'clean' and 'natural' is to use green colours in its design and imagery. Consumers will often be reassured that buying certain products means that they are also saving the planet in a small way – this is projected by marketing green packaging, images of natural landscapes, etc.

Nevertheless, it is advisable to investigate a seller's or manufacturer's real ecological credentials, and whether the imagery/content is not simply a marketing ploy to



influence making a purchase.

Dropshipping and the Environment

Some third-party marketing e-commerce sites promote allegedly environmentally-friendly products but sometimes the process of dropshipping involves marketing unchecked poor-quality and even counterfeit products, imported at greater cost from outside the EU, which means from a far longer distance. Before ordering from unregulated markets and industries, check the credentials of the seller and the manufacturer and think of the distance the product travels to reach you. Don't forget you must also pay customs charges if importing from third countries outside the European Union.

Green Webhosting

Websites are hosted on servers, which require a lot of electricity, space and air conditioning to store data. Increased digitalisation and growing demand for digital connected devices means that digital technology, including the web and ever larger data centres, are responsible for increased electricity demands globally.

Some green web hosting companies seek to power their data centres with 100% renewable energy. Many green data centres are located in the colder Nordic countries where the energy emitted by the servers is reused to heat air and water in adjacent buildings. However, other web hosts call themselves 'green' only because they offset their carbon footprint by reinvesting the equivalent of the energy consumed in environmental initiatives (tree planting, etc.).

It would be difficult for a consumer to ascertain that a website uses green web hosting unless it is specified on the website information and the information is verifiable in some way. However, it is always worth looking into the current or future environmental commitments of any of website or search before making your choice.



#3

**Think before
you click!**

It's getting easier and easier to buy online, but to avoid overconsumption, be mindful before you click. First, ask yourself if you really need the product or is it that you just can't resist a sale? Before you buy, do your research: make sure it is the right item so that you avoid having to send it back if you don't like it. To be a responsible e-consumer, you have to make the right decisions. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Need or want?

It is becoming harder not to give in to all-round sales and big events such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday, etc. Prices are getting slashed, marketing is getting smarter but watch out for advertising ploys that aim to part you with your money even if you don't really want to shop. You will see pop-up displays such as "X people are interested in this product" or "buy now, only 3 left" or any banners that create a sense of urgency in prospective buyers.

Before you reach for your credit card and go for that irresistible offer, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I really need this product right now?
- Is this product environmentally friendly?
- Is this the best product on the market?

Before you buy, try to do a simple comparison by comparing similar products in terms of price and sustainability.

Don't go to the dark side!

'Dark patterns' are digital marketing techniques that distort decision-making processes and manipulate consumers by guiding online users onto a path that ends in a sale or a transaction.

Questionable online commercial practices that prevent consumers from making an informed choice by using their behavioural biases against them is one of the European Commission's priorities for its 2020-2025 action programme.

A common 'dark pattern' is what they call 'confirmshaming', which is meant to make consumers feel guilty if they do not go ahead with the purchase they are guided to. This type of emotional marketing techniques is responsible for many rushed purchase decisions that lead to overconsumption and falling for products that may not be good for you or the planet.

Example: When you click to refuse a marketing offer, a discount or to sign-up to receive promotions by e-mail, a message appears where you are asked to confirm things like:

"No, thanks, I hate saving money"

or

"No thanks, I hate receiving good deals, I prefer to pay full price"

These are meant to shame the consumer into feeling embarrassed for not acting on the marketing request.

Note: Dark patterns can be found not only on websites. According to a [European Commission study](#) published in May 2022 97% of the most popular websites and apps used by EU consumers deployed at least one dark pattern.

More information on how some websites deceive or manipulate you can be found on [the website of ECC France](#).

Something old, something new?

The **second-hand** market is a goldmine for many items that can be re-used several times over their life cycle: books, toys, board games, furniture, sports equipment, ready-to-wear clothing, children's clothes, etc.

Second-hand products can now be found on many online platforms and websites Europe, especially when it comes to books, decorative items and brand clothes.

Buying a **refurbished** product, particularly an electronic or mechanical device, is also a good way to reuse a product though there are no clear Europe-wide technical standards as to what a refurbished product is.

In some countries, refurbished can simply mean a new, never-used product that is being sold for a second time. In others, a refurbished product is always a second hand product that has been repaired and resold.

Example: In France, refurbished means a second-hand product which has undergone tests covering all its functionalities in order to establish that it meets the legal safety obligations and the use that the consumer can legitimately expect. Before going on sale again, former user data has been deleted.

Note: Second-hand or reconditioned products purchased from a professional seller are covered by legal guarantee and conformity rules in the European Union. You can find out more on what this means on our website www.europe-consommateurs.eu.

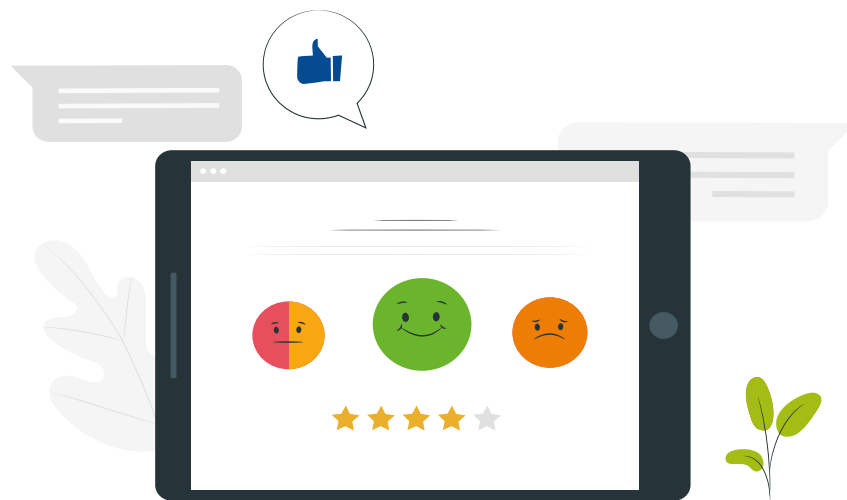
Know all about the item to purchase

Have you spotted a pair of trousers on a Spanish website and are wondering about the exact fit? The piece of furniture you are interested in from a website



in Italy only features two photos taken from a similar angle? Still not convinced you should buy? Check out comparison sites and social reviews from the brand's customers. They can sometimes help you make the right choice and reveal more about the products.

If you really want to make a purchase but still have doubts, do not hesitate to contact the seller directly if you have questions.



The path of no return?

You are still not sure whether you should buy a product but the seller offers you free delivery? Is there always an option of free return if you change your mind? These are questions many consumers are faced with every day.

The good news is that online purchases in the European Union come with a 'right of withdrawal'. This means that you can return any online purchase without having to give a reason. So this means, that you are never stuck with a product which doesn't meet your expectations.



In the European Union, you have a [14-day right of withdrawal](#) for many products, but returning a product should be an exception. Which is why it is important to know exactly what you are buying in order to avoid having to return it.

The right of withdrawal aims to give consumers the opportunity to test the product as you would have done in a shop. If you find that it does not suit you, you can then return it. This is why it is important not to give in to impulse online purchases that you may end up regretting later. There are a few things to keep in mind when it comes to returning products bought online.

Changing your mind about your purchase and withdrawing from your order may mean you have to pay a return fee (unless the seller pays for the return shipping costs). More importantly, in terms of the environment, returning the product back to the seller will involve transporting the same goods for a second time, which means causing a second round of CO₂ emissions. Some sellers will not resell returned product which means it may go to a landfill. Some recent research in France estimates that the rate of returns is between 10% and 40% depending on the sector, and even higher in the fast fashion and footwear retail industries. If a return is unavoidable and the trader doesn't organise the return, try to reuse the original packaging for return and an environmentally-friendly shipping company.

Making an informed choice and knowing exactly what you are buying helps reduce order returns that are costly for the industry, the consumers and the environment.

Here are some tips on how you can help limit order returns.

- Try to get an accurate idea of the product. Look for detailed product descriptions and good quality photos. If not satisfactory, search for additional information about the product elsewhere.
- Avoid ordering several sizes of the same garment and returning items that don't fit. On ready-to-wear websites, you can see how clothes and accessories look on a real person or a mannequin. You should be able to get an accurate picture and description of the waist size, chest size and body fit. If you wish to find out more before you buy, ask the seller directly.
- It is always useful to read online consumer reviews or watch unboxing videos so that you know exactly what you are buying. Nevertheless, make sure that reviews come from verified customers on credible review sites as there are many false reviews online these days.

VIP Subscriptions

Have you ever placed an order and were then offered a 'premium' subscription? Some websites and brands now offer what is called a 'VIP', 'premium', 'prime' or 'exclusive' subscription, whereby you get product discounts and express delivery if you sign up to a monthly or weekly contract that allows you to make regular purchases in exchange for an overall price reduction.

While beneficial in terms of cost, this might push people to buy more than they need thus also creating more deliveries that impact the environment. You might consider whether the website is pushing you towards overconsumption and whether you need everything offered just because the price for multiple deliveries over a certain period of time is overall lower.

How to reduce your digital carbon footprint

We may not realise just how big our digital carbon footprint is. Everything that we do online, which is a lot these days, [generates emissions](#). One of the things we often do is subscribe to newsletters from brands and shops. But keep in mind that sending newsletters and other commercial e-mails costs energy so think whether you need that newsletter or not.

In principle, unsubscribing is simple and can be done via a link at the end of the e-mail newsletter. There are also free apps that can bulk-unsubscribe you from multiple newsletters. Or you can simply use an ad-blocker extension in your browser to prevent targeted marketing that offers subscriptions of any kind, including e-mail marketing.

#4

Delivery?

Make it green!



Express delivery, grouped delivery and collection are just some of the convenient options when buy online. Before you confirm your purchases, it is best to find out which shipping company the seller uses so that you can opt for an ecological delivery method and limit your impact on the environment.

Express but not excellent!

Express delivery usually means within 24 hours or same-day delivery. It surely is a great feeling when you can get your online order in no time at all and by selecting the fastest delivery method offered by the seller, especially when it is free.



But behind express delivery there is actually a considerable extra amount of pollution. Fast delivery means that the courier will send out containers or vehicles that are not 100% full, which will increase the number of delivery journeys. In 2020 the World Economic Forum [estimated](#) CO₂ emissions linked to shipping could increase by 30% (or 6 million tonnes) by 2030. This should be enough to make us think twice about our shopping behaviour.

In some sectors, express delivery is not always synonymous with pollution – this is where the delivery is done by greener methods and/or is done locally, over a short distance. For example, in Belgium, a large retailer offers local groceries delivery within 90 minutes, by bike courier.

Keep in mind that ordering last minute is also risky. If the order does not reach you in time, you may not be able to cancel it immediately. In Europe, you must [first give notice to the seller](#) to deliver within a new time limit before you can cancel your order, unless the seller guarantees an automatic refund or you have explicitly told them that the delivery time limit is essential.

Another way to reduce delivery journeys and energy consumption is grouping orders with other customers, where possible. This will reduce transport, fuel and packaging, too.

Think collection first

Opting for delivery at a collection point may reduce transport length, and therefore CO₂ emissions. Often the consumer is not present at the time of delivery so the parcel is returned to the courier depot and the delivery must be attempted again, which means that the number of journeys has doubled.

If the parcel is kept at a collection point, there is no need for a second delivery attempt as the consumer can pick up the order at their convenience, and in places such as regular shops that they would visit anyway. Collection is available with most online shops in France and elsewhere and it is usually free of charge, too. Alternatively, you can get your items delivery in a place where you will be any given day, such as your office or school, or anywhere in between home and these. You might even avoid collecting your parcel with a car if it is not too heavy, which saves quite a few CO₂ emissions in the process.

Last-Mile Logistics

The 'last mile' is the final stage of delivery to your home, which represents a not insignificant percentage of a product's journey to the end-consumer. In France, for example, according to the French Agency for Ecological Transition (ADEME), it accounts for 30% of the total cost of transporting a good or service. The logistics of short-distance delivery is more common in polluted urban areas. Which is why some retailers are partnering with transporters that provide alternative solutions.

Examples:

Especially in congested urban areas, it is smarter and greener to use faster and smaller vehicles such as: bicycle couriers for small deliveries, cargo-bike for large parcel deliveries, last-mile modular containerisation by e-cargo vehicle, water transport deliveries (e.g. by barge), real-time parcel tracking to ensure you never miss a delivery.

Note: If you instruct the courier to deliver to your neighbour, the seller will no longer be responsible for the parcel once it is received by the neighbour. For more information, see our article on [deliveries in Europe](#).

Since the [ban on geo-blocking in the European Union](#), a European seller cannot refuse to sell you a product based on your place of residence, nationality, bank account localisation etc. Nevertheless, delivery to your country can be refused if the seller doesn't usually provide delivery there. In this case, you may have to organise the delivery of your purchase yourself. If you do, choose an environmentally friendly method of transport.

#5

**Green
Packaging**



Buying a product which is designed and delivered in a green way is good, but when it's green-packaged too, that's even better. Here are some packaging options that are good for consumers and the environment.

Natural Packaging

Bio-packaging made from natural materials such as cornstarch cardboard, honeycomb packaging, grass and kraft paper etc. means that waste generated by agricultural and industrial processes can be put to good use instead of being discarded. Often these materials are compostable and biodegradable. Other ways in which you can stay green with your packaging is by re-using and re-cycling things like bubble wrap, concertina cardboard and air cushions.

Too Many Boxes

Who hasn't received a product in a box three times bigger than the product itself? According to a study carried out in 2018, a quarter of the volume of shipping boxes is empty. Matching the box size with the product dimensions is not always easy – that is why some online retailers end up packaging products with bigger boxes and sometimes also send an order in multiple deliveries.

Reducing box sizes in both manufacturing and shipping ends up saving materials, shock-absorbing wrapping and energy. It also means more container space and less transport journeys, and, consequently, less CO₂ emissions. It might be a good idea to suggest this to e-tailers or mention excessive packaging in consumer reviews online. Every consumer can make a difference.



Circular Packaging

Is the packaging in good condition and you think it's a shame to throw it away? Here are some solutions from our European neighbours.

- In Finland and Germany, a mapping application helps you find traders looking for recycled packaging near you. Other apps help identify traders who use second-hand packaging.
- There are sellers, in Slovenia for example, who allow you to return the packaging so it can be reused for further orders. Another shop sells cleaning and cosmetic products in returnable cartons.
- Some sellers in Europe offer discounts for returned packaging. Many restaurants sell unsold food if customers collect it using their own containers.



#6

**Repair, Reuse,
Recycle**

Product under guarantee? Repair, don't discard!

Give your items a second life by repairing or repurposing them. Instead of throwing out things we no longer need, let's think of alternative ways to prolong their shelf lives.

Repairing appliances means less products are discarded, therefore less pollution and less new products are needed. Under European law, all appliances have a 2-year legal guarantee that can be used for repairs or replacement if they break down. The legal guarantee applies regardless of whether you buy from a seller in France or another EU country.

Here are some good examples from Europe:

- In France as well as in Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway and Romania, the guarantee is on hold while the product is being repaired.
- If you opt for repairs, in Austria, Croatia, France, Greece and Iceland, you will get your guarantee extended.
- Since January 2022, French buyers who shop on European websites aiming the French market will have their product guarantee extended by 6 months if they opt to repair a broken product. If the seller replaces the defective product instead of repairing it against your choice, you will benefit from a new 2-year warranty on the replaced product.

If you have any doubts about the law applicable to your purchase, do not hesitate [to contact your ECC](#).

Note: If the legal guarantee of conformity has expired, you may have a longer commercial warranty provided by the retailer or the manufacturer. You may benefit from at least one free repair under the product warranty terms. In France, the warranty is on hold until the product is repaired.

Life Beyond Warranty

In 2021, rules on EU manufacturer product guarantees and warranties have changed as follows:

- Manufacturer guarantee and availability of spare parts for refrigeration appliances is now 7 years.
- Spare parts must be available for 10 years for washing machines, tumble dryers and dishwashers.
- Manufacturers must deliver the spare parts within 15 days.
- Product guarantee/warranty must detail possible breakages, how they will be repaired and what parts are replaceable as standard.
- They must provide a list of spare parts available on the Internet.

For more information on measures to encourage repairs in European countries, see <https://www.europe-consommateurs.eu/en/shopping-internet/spare-parts-and-repairs.html>

Note: If you are unable to repair your product or obtain spare parts, contact your nearest repair shop and think of the numerous co-repair workshops organised throughout Europe. You may just find the parts you need!



Good practices from Europe

- In **Greece, Romania and Portugal** you can avail of after-sales assistance/ service, including the supply of spare parts for the estimated average lifespan of the products.
- In **Slovenia**, the manufacturer must repair products and supply spare parts for at least 3 years after the expiry of the warranty period, at a cost.
- In **Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands**, small repairs of bicycles, shoes, leather goods, clothing and household textiles are subject to a reduced VAT rate.



Donate, Exchange, Repurpose

Are you accumulating bags and bags of old clothes? Is your TV broken beyond repair? Think about recycling them!

Here are a few things you can do with your old things.

- Drop them off at collection points, clothes banks and charity drives.
- Before donating an item of clothing, consider if it's worth altering it or repurposing it. Many dressmakers or artists can give a second life (sewing, decoration, etc.) to a garment by turning it into another piece of clothing or decorative item.
- For electronic or household appliances, contact organisations that offer to recover, repair and resell this type of second-hand goods.
- Some shops also collect used items. Find out about the shops' take-back offers or the recycling or processing solutions to make sure that this is not just greenwashing. Ask about the store's overall environmental policy. Are other efforts made in this direction? What is its business model? If you see for example that the fashion store is putting out new collections at rock-bottom prices every three weeks and is practicing what is called fast fashion, ask yourself and why not the store if its take-back campaigns are truly eco-responsible and not just greenwashing. You think your questions are disturbing? For many people, consumers and salespeople alike, these questions have become part of their routine, so don't hesitate.
- Your old furniture and other appliances can be re-sold in a second-hand sale depot or on consumer-to-consumer online marketplaces. Second-hand sale platforms are available in France, as in other European countries.
- Consider freecycling and/or swapping. There are exchange platforms where people can donate items for free or swap with others. There are many such groups online and on social media too.

Note: The European Union Waste Management [Directive](#) provides a clear framework for the expected life of a product which includes these stages: durable design, reuse, recycling, repurposing, and, only as a last resort, disposal.

Car parts sale and exchange sites

Some car parts websites, especially in Germany, offer discounted prices for trading used parts when you buy new ones (e.g., buy a new particle filter and send in your old, used filter). Such companies recycle or recondition used parts for resale, a clever way to recycle products which contributes to the overall circular economy.

Note: One thing to keep in mind however is that some of these websites charge you a deposit, refundable upon receipt of the part (this can be as much as €200 or more). Make sure you are not losing this deposit, which is sometimes not refunded on account that the part sent in is incomplete. Some consumers experienced problems having the parts and/or the deposits returned as a result.



Repurposing and Upcycling!

Upcycling literally means repairing and repurposing an old item into something new, sometimes more valuable than the original product. Upcycling involves either refurbishing and perfecting a product or reusing the materials from an old product to create something entirely new. It is often a product of higher quality and more creative.

Examples: transforming a drinks bottle into a vase or a light fixture, making an elaborate handbag out of denim patchwork from old jeans; creating clothes and accessories from manufacturer or retailer stock fabric cut-offs and unsold materials.

Potentially, any old object in your house can have a new life. There are many hobby groups and lots of internet inspiration to help you on an artistic journey which is also good for the environment. If you want to start upcycling now, there are many tutorials, tips and DIY websites to choose from online.



**Sustainable
Online Shopping
in France**

A short glossary

Produit « bio »

(Organic product)

This must be a product resulting from organic farming, which does not use synthetic chemicals, genetically-modified seeds and processes, and limits the use of additives, such as fertilisers, insecticides, etc.

Empreinte carbone

(Carbon footprint)

A measure of the amount of CO₂ (a greenhouse gas) released into the atmosphere by any one activity.

Certifié agriculture biologique

(Certified-organic product)

A product certified as organically grown.

Bilan carbone négatif

(Climate-positive or carbon-negative)

These terms indicate a negative carbon footprint, i.e., when a company produces products or supplies services using processes that reduce carbon emissions and offsets its emissions.

Cruelty-Free

This means the product has not been tested on animals and is sometimes associated with 'vegan' products.

« Faites-le par vous-même »

(DIY)

Short for 'Do it yourself', here referring to recycling and reuse.

Durable

Long-term, long-lasting.

Efficacité énergétique

(Energy efficient)

A product with low energy consumption or clever distribution of the energy use during an activity or process.

Mode durable / éthique

(Ethical (slow) fashion)

The opposite of 'fast fashion', it favours quality and durability of clothes rather than quantity and also promotes ethical working conditions of the workers producing the garments for the manufacturing or retail chain.

Greenwashing / Social washing

A marketing strategy aimed at making people believe that the company has ethical and environmental policies when it comes to manufacturing processes and product credentials.

Commerce équitable

(Fair trade)

Systems of certification based on ethical trading standards for farmers and workers that aim to ensure equitable and fair conditions in the production and sale of their products.

Mode éphémère / mode express

(Fast fashion)

It generally describes mass-produced inexpensive clothing produced and also discontinued at a fast rate by manufacturers and retailers in response to the latest, quick-changing trends. Its marketing drives consumers to over-consumption and encourages people to replace cheap old clothes with new ones continuously. High volumes of these clothes end up in the landfill.

Réchauffement climatique

(Global warming)

Associated with climate change.

Mode de vie éco-responsable

(Green living)

A lifestyle based on personal consumption and activities which are kind on the environment.

Reconditionné

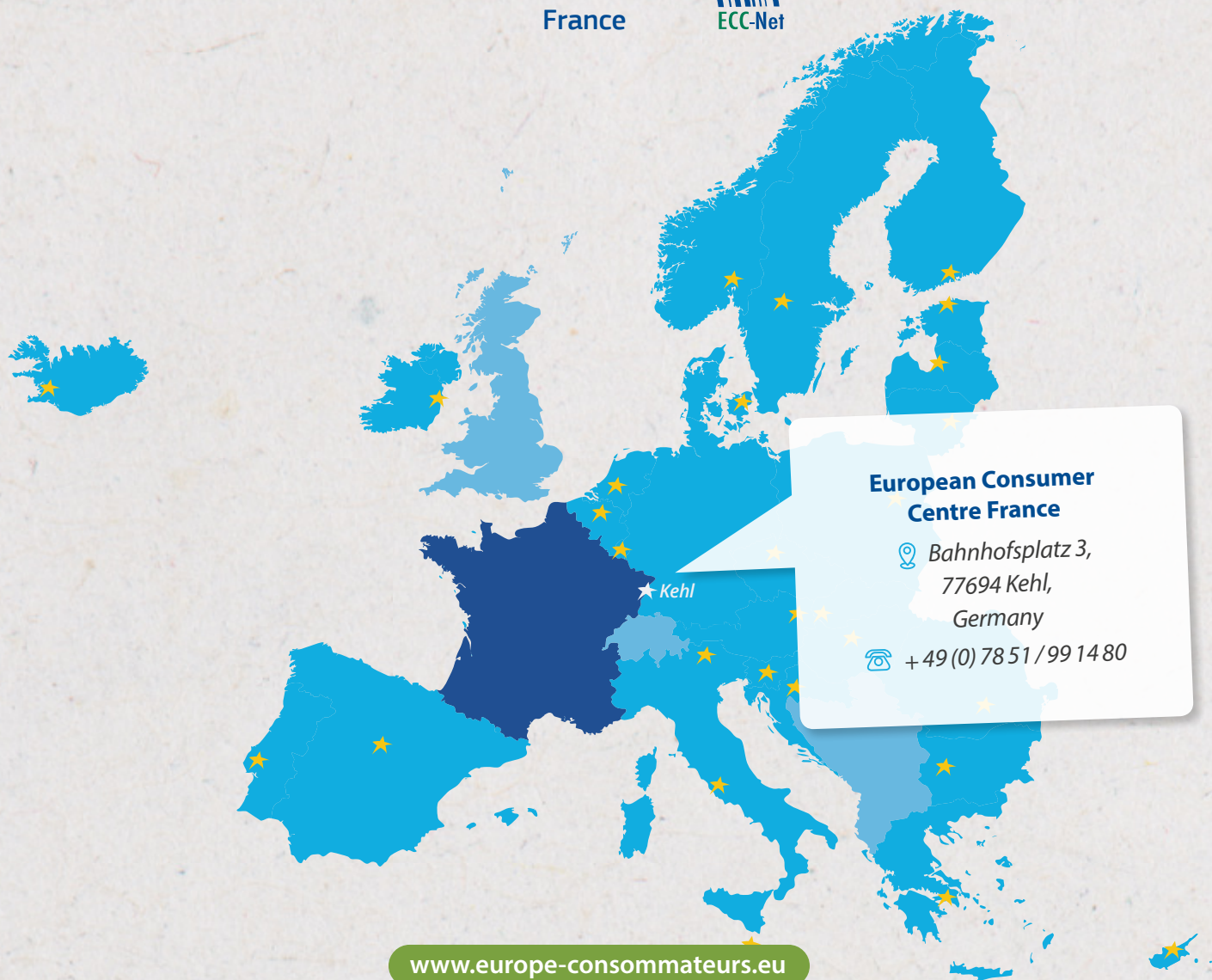
(Refurbished)

Also known as 'reconditioned.' In France, refurbished means a second-hand product which has undergone tests covering all its functionalities in order to establish that it meets the legal safety obligations and the use that the consumer can legitimately expect. Before going on sale again, former user data has been deleted.

Produit d'occasion

(Second-hand)

Used item, which is therefore no longer sold as new.



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