



June 2012

Food Waste Collection and Composting at Food-Service Establishments

Q: Is separating food scraps for composting allowed by the Department of Health?

A: Yes, provided the collection, storage and (if applicable) on-site composting of this material meets the requirements of the Vermont Department of Health's *Health Regulations for Food Service Establishments*, section 5-213 "Garbage and Refuse Disposal". In fact, by removing food waste from your trash, you may have fewer problems with odors and vermin.

Q: So what do I do with food scraps if I'm not putting them in my trash?

A: Most food-service establishments contract with a hauler to have them picked up. Ask your hauler if they provide this service, or contact your Solid Waste Management District for information on available options. See the DEC website page below for District contacts. Your hauler will provide secure containers for outdoor scrap storage. Food scrap pickup should occur at least once per week.

If you have space, you can also compost food scraps on site provided you meet the requirements of the Health Department regulations cited above.

If you want to explore on-site composting, contact your Solid Waste District or one of the other resources listed on the DEC's Composting page for training and technical help (<http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/compost/main2.htm>).

Q: How can I keep my food scrap collection bins from smelling and attracting flies and rodents?

A: There are a number of preventative steps you can take:

Empty indoor collection containers at the end of each shift and outdoor collection bins every week. If it is not possible to empty the bins every week, food waste should not sit in collection bins any longer than two weeks.

Add wood shavings or sawdust to the bottom of the bin and to cover material. At the end of each day, add a blanket of sawdust, wood shavings or leaves to the top of the food waste in your outdoor bin. This will help keep odors down, discourage scavengers and help soak up excess liquid.

Keep all food scrap collection bins clean. Some solid waste hauler services may offer a rinsing service or clean-for-dirty bin swap when they pick up your food scraps. If yours does not offer this service, you will need to clean it regularly. Choose interior collection containers that can be run through your dishwasher.

Use a compostable liner bag, if allowed by your composter. Not all compost facilities accept these bags. Check with your solid waste hauler or compost facility to find out what is acceptable.

Treat your food scrap storage containers the same as your refuse containers. As with refuse containers, it is important to have your food scrap storage container far enough away from the food establishment so it does not affect the health and safety of your establishment. If you have a question about where to store your food waste collection tote, ask your Health Department Sanitarian during your next inspection.

Q: Can I compost meat, bones, and dairy products?

A: If you contract with a solid waste hauler for food scrap pickup, you can most likely include these materials. Check with your hauler or the compost facility that is receiving your scraps for specifics on what can and can't be included.

Do not include these materials in on-site compost bins, since these systems do not reach high enough temperatures to kill bacteria and pathogens.

Q: Can I put my biodegradable and compostable coffee cup or utensils in the totes?

A: Check with your hauler or the compost facility that is receiving your material. Many commercial compost facilities do not accept any "compostable products" at this time. Facilities that do accept these items have strict requirements to ensure that the products are in fact compostable and are also easy to distinguish from non-compostable products.

If you compost on-site, it is not recommended that you include compostable products or packaging since these items will not break down adequately in a reasonable time frame because the temperatures are not as high as at commercial facilities.

Q: How long does it take for these food scraps to turn into usable compost?

A: Generally it takes between six to 12 months to create finished compost depending on the process, volume, and management.

Need More Information?

Health Department Food and Lodging Regulations:
http://healthvermont.gov/regs/03food_estab.pdf

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Solid Waste Management Program Composting page:
<http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/compost/main2.htm>