

Managing Food Scraps and Recycling

At Resorts, Hotels, & Other Lodging



State law bans recyclables and food scraps from the trash.

Resorts need recycling and food scrap collection systems for residents, guests, and staff.

Systems can vary widely. Each establishment can design what works best for them. Staff must be trained to use the recycling and food scrap systems properly.



Many resorts hire a hauler to pick up their recycling and food scraps, just like trash collection. All haulers must offer recycling collection services for commercial customers. Ask your hauler if they offer food scrap pick-up or find a food scrap hauler at VTrecycles.com. Haulers typically provide collection containers and details on what is accepted in recycling and food scrap containers.

Some establishments with a small amount of food scraps may choose to drop the scraps off at transfer stations or compost sites. Others compost scraps on-site in bins or use solar digesters. Learn more about these options at VTrecycles.com or [in the FAQ for small businesses](#).

General Strategies & Tips:

Provide clear instructions on what to put in recycling, food scrap, and trash collection bins.

1. **Label** bins with signs with images of common items that go in each bin. **Download free signs and graphics at VTrecycles.com** (click the “download materials” button). Your hauler or [local waste district or town](#) may be able to provide signs. Have a marketing team? See if they can help!
2. Regularly **train staff** on the system and ask them if they have ideas to make it work better.



Download Materials



Food Scraps

Ideally, build an outdoor enclosure that is large enough for trash, recycling, and food scrap containers. This looks tidy, helps keep animals away, and reduces the chance of illegal dumping. Consult with your hauler(s) before installing something new to make sure it works for their trucks.



Monitor bins for contamination and train staff. Contamination is any item that does not belong in a bin, such as trash in the recycling. Teach staff which items contaminate the recycling and the food scrap bins. When appropriate, train staff to remove contamination when visible, and make tools, like tongs, available to do this safely. Train staff to empty food scrap buckets and recycling bins full of trash into the trash.

For Food Scraps: Place a bin of sawdust, wood shavings, or dried leaves next to the food scrap bin and cover food scraps daily.

This helps reduce odors, keeps the food scrap bin cleaner, and creates a more pleasant food-scrap-dumping experience, especially in the summer. Some haulers provide this cover material. If yours does not, ask them what cover material you should use.



Regularly evaluate your system. Are there ways to make it more efficient or work better? What is working well? Experiment to figure out what works best.

Get Free Assistance. We are here to help! Contact your local waste district or town at 802recycles.com or VT DEC: 802-828-1138; anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov

In guest rooms, apartments, or condos:

Communicate with guests or residents. Provide detailed instructions for systems to work, for example—explain during check-in, on a handout in rooms, etc. Tell them what happens to materials (i.e., food scraps are turned into a nutrient-rich soil amendment that's applied to agricultural fields). [Customers prefer sustainable businesses.](#)



Provide well-labeled containers. For example, a small recycling bin and food scrap container:

- In each room or unit (e.g. condos, rooms with kitchenettes, etc.).
- On each floor, near the ice machine or kitchenette (e.g. bed & breakfasts).

If all food scrap, recycling, and trash containers have the same color coding, labeling, and setup, people will be less confused and use them correctly more often.



Create convenient and accessible disposal locations.

- If guests/residents take out their trash, provide a recycling and food scrap collection bin at each outdoor trash consolidation area (e.g. for condos).
- If staff collect trash and recycling from guest rooms or units, and there are food scrap containers in each unit, have staff collect food scraps as well. This system works well because **staff can look in the food scraps and make sure they are not full of trash** before adding them to the consolidated food scrap container.



In a restaurant or cafe:

Have a system to rinse recyclables if necessary to remove stuck-on food.

Collect food scraps in labeled, washable containers like 5-gallon buckets, and empty them into the food scrap totes or dumpster. Some haulers collect food scraps in 5-gallon buckets.

Teach your staff to separate food scraps properly, including making sure trash, like plastic produce stickers, stays out of the food scraps.

Restaurant Tips:

- To keep trash out of your food scraps, have staff collect plates or have customers bring full plates or trays to a kitchen window, so trained staff can properly sort food scraps from trash.
- If guests bus their own dishes, **place signs** with recycling and composting instructions **where guests wait in line** to get their food, pay, and/or bus their dishes.
- It helps to serve fewer plastic items that could end up in the food scraps—**consider providing only durable & reusable service ware or certified compostable items (if your food scrap hauler allows them).**



Save money and help your community!

- Contact VT DEC [to learn how to save money by reducing food waste](#). You also end up with fewer food scraps to manage.
- Have food you can't serve or sell? Donate quality food to staff or the local food shelf.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can we use compostable bags to keep the containers clean?



It depends where your scraps end up. Ask your hauler or composter if they accept [BPI-certified](#) compostable bags (see label on left). If they do, ask what brand you should use—some products that say they are compostable do not actually break down in a compost pile. Some composters may accept paper bags, paper towel, or newspaper liners.

Is it okay to give food scraps to pig farmers or chicken farmers?

Only food scraps that have not touched meat/fish or their oils/juices may be fed to pigs. To learn more, read the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's [Guidance on Feeding Food Scraps to Pigs](#). Chickens may be given any food scraps, including meat.

Can we put food scraps down the drain using our in-sink garbage disposal?

Yes, but this is not advised, as food scraps can create costly problems for municipal sewer systems. Septic systems are not designed to handle large amounts of food scraps either, particularly fats, so putting them down the drain can clog pipes and lead to a need to pump septic tanks more often.

What if I am worried about bears?

Check out VT DEC's [tips for keeping bears away from food scrap and trash collection containers](#) before you have a problem. Ideally, use [bear-resistant containers](#) or place collection containers where bears cannot access them. If this is not possible, [place an electric fence around the containers](#) to deter bears—put peanut butter or bacon grease on a piece of aluminum foil attached to the fence so curious bears get zapped on the nose and are scared away. If a bear disturbs your containers, try to scare the bear away and contact VT Fish and Wildlife for more advice on deterring the bear before it becomes a recurring problem. Fill out [this form](#) to get in touch.

How can we discourage insects from the outside cart in the summer?

In warmer months, cover food scraps with several inches of dry plant material (e.g. leaves, wood shavings, sawdust, etc.) or dried coffee grounds. Many people do this all year long, for a cleaner food scrap collection experience.

Can we use compostable dishes?

- 1) Ask your [food scrap hauler](#).
- 2) If your food scrap hauler accepts compostable dishes, ask 1) what types and 2) if compostable plastics need to be certified compostable (see label above). **Not all products labeled “compostable” or biodegradable” break down completely, so composters must be careful about what they accept.**
- 3) If you use compostable dishes, post clear signs so people know what to compost and what to trash. Train staff and develop strategies to keep the compost bin free of trash.
- 4) Compostable dishes are not recyclable, unless they are 100% paper/cardboard and clean.

**Is anyone going to enforce the law’s requirements?**

Yes. The Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has enforcement authority. However, we try to prevent enforcement through education and outreach. Solid waste districts and towns may have enforcement authority under local ordinances.

How much does recycling and food scrap collection cost?

Costs vary, as they do for trash services and must be negotiated with your hauler. Find haulers in your region at VTrecycles.com. When comparing quotes, consider how often the hauler would provide pick-up service, how often they clean food scrap containers, and whether they provide a cover material for the food scraps.

We cannot control our guests’ behavior—are we responsible for what they put in the trash?

Your business or institution is responsible for all solid waste materials produced during normal operations. To help customers and staff properly separate their materials, teach them how to use the food scrap and recycling system and use the standardized Vermont Universal Recycling symbols (download at VTrecycles.com) to create signs for your facility.

Overall, businesses must have a food scrap collection system, regularly train staff to use the system properly, and manage the food scraps separately from the trash. The Universal Recycling Law allows business that meet these requirements to trash a “de minimis”, or insignificant, amount of food scraps that occasionally end up in the trash by accident.

What should we do with meat and bones?

If you get your food scraps picked up or take them to a drop-off, include meat and bones with the rest of the food scraps.

I have more questions!

Visit VTrecycles.com, to learn more. Or give us a call at 802-828-1138.

Resources:

[UVM Dorms Case Study](#). In their dorms, UVM students put their food scraps in brown paper bags with a compostable cellulose lining (their composter accepts these bags). Students bring the bags to a collection tote near the front desk of the dorm.

[Hotel Kitchen](#). A toolkit and case studies for reducing food waste and saving money in hotel food service. Created by the World Wildlife Fund and the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

[Managing Food Scrap and Trash Carts in Bear Country](#). Tips for keeping bears away from food scrap (and trash) collection containers. Created by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and DEC.

[Living with Black Bears](#). General resources from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Learn more about Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, composting, and waste management at VTrecycles.com or by calling VT DEC at 802-828-1138.