

Food scraps can't go in the trash in Vermont as of July 1, 2020 (Vermont Universal Recycling Law) and the Vermont Department of Health's [Vermont Rental Housing Health Code](#) requires landlords to:

1) **Assure arrangements are made for the removal of food scraps from rentals.**

“Arrangements” can be made in a wide variety of ways. In multi-unit settings, it often makes sense to manage trash, recycling, and food scraps collectively. Certain food scrap management options may not be feasible for some tenants—for example, some tenants do not drive or there may not be space to manage scraps on-site.



For example, the landlord can:

- a. Subscribe to a food scrap pick-up service for tenants,
- b. Ensure the tenants bring food scraps to a drop-off,
- c. Set up a backyard compost system or solar digesters for tenants, or
- d. Require tenants to make an independent plan to manage their food scraps separate from the trash and confirm that this happens. It helps when landlords explain the local options and how to get help figuring out what to do (see tips on page 2).



2) **Provide durable and water-tight receptacles for food scraps that are stored outside.** If the food scraps are stored outside until they are hauled away, brought to a drop-off, or composted, the landlord must provide a durable, cleanable, watertight container for this purpose. A properly managed, enclosed backyard compost bin or solar digester fulfills this requirement. If residents bring food scraps directly from the kitchen to a drop-off, landlords are not required to provide a container. Landlords are not required to provide kitchen containers, but some may provide these to encourage good food scrap management habits.



- a. For pick-ups: Food scrap haulers typically provide containers—either rolling carts (like recycling & trash) to store in a shed, garage, or outside, or a bucket for each unit or two. If a hauler does not provide a container, and the scraps will be stored outside, the landlord must provide a receptacle.
- b. For drop-offs: Five-gallon buckets with a lid work well for each unit's food scraps.
- c. For backyards: If someone is willing to actively manage the bin, landlords can install backyard compost bins. Or, landlords can install solar digesters, which do not require much maintenance when set up properly (may need to be emptied every few years).



**The Code also requires landlords to:**

- 1) Keep common areas, and other parts of the premises not used as a dwelling space, in a clean and sanitary condition free from trash, recyclables, and food scraps.
- 2) Ensure that trash, recycling, and food scrap containers and systems do not attract pests or create a public health hazard.

## To get started:

- 1) **Hire a company to pick up food scraps.** More and more hauling companies collect food scraps, so ask your trash and recycling hauler if they will pick up food scraps as well. Or, find a food scrap hauler at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com). Haulers usually provide and pick up either 5-gallon buckets or rolling carts. Fees vary.
- 2) **Drop off food scraps** at a transfer station, fast trash/bag drop, or compost site. Contact your local waste management entity at [802recycles.com](http://802recycles.com) to find locations in your area. Fees vary.
- 3) **Compost or digest food scraps in the backyard.** If your rental only has a few units and you or your tenants are willing to actively manage the piles, backyard composting or using a solar digester can be an easy option. [Plastic compost bins](#) set on top of wire-mesh hardware cloth will deter most pests (learn more about composting, solar digesters, and managing food scraps in bear country at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com)). Residents that manage their food scraps in their yard can put meat and bones in the trash (the law allows this).

## What works best for rentals?

It depends on your location, your tenants, and your preferences. While backyard composting is an option for some, it may not be feasible at many properties because it requires space and some ongoing effort to properly manage the pile (e.g. to mix the pile occasionally, empty the bin in the fall, etc.). Landlords and tenants may prefer to get food scraps picked up by a hauler or to drop off food scraps at a transfer station or compost site.

## Do you have any tips for starting food scrap collection in my building(s)?

1. **Explain the food scrap collection system** to all tenants, including:
  1. Their responsibility to collect food scraps in their home,
  2. What materials your food scrap hauler or drop-off accept (**what is and is not allowed in the food scrap bin**). This varies, as some composters **do not** accept paper products or compostable service-ware and others do. Most food scrap haulers and drop-offs accept all food scraps, including meat, bones, fats, oils, coffee grounds and filters, and spoiled food.
  3. The collection schedule & if they need to put bins at the curb.
2. If tenants compost on-site, remind them that meat and bones should not go in the backyard bin, as they can attract animals (their meat and bones can go in the trash or to a compost drop-off).
3. Remind your tenants each year and check in to see if they have questions.
4. If tenants put items in the wrong place, send them reminders about the system. If you see trash in the food scrap bin, remove it and remind tenants that it does not belong there and contaminates the compost.
5. If there is shared space, put up signs that explain the new system with words and pictures. Signs should be placed in common areas and on or above the bins. You can print free recycling, food scraps, and trash signs at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com). Your hauler may be able to provide signs.



Your local waste district or town may be able to help with education and signs—find them at [802recycles.com](http://802recycles.com) or call VT DEC for assistance at 802-828-1138.

## Why is it important to keep food waste out of the landfill?

Food waste makes up about 20% of Vermont's trash. Keeping food scraps out of the trash reduces greenhouse gas emissions and saves landfill space. Much wasted food is perfectly good (or would be good if eaten in time) and can be fed to people instead of going in the trash. Food scraps can also feed animals, create renewable energy, or produce compost, which restores soils.



## Who pays for the food scrap pick-up service or drop-off fees?

Neither the Universal Recycling Law or the Vermont Rental Housing Health Code specify who pays for food scrap, trash, recycling, or other waste management services, so either party may pay—it is up to the landlord and tenant to work this out. The landlord is responsible for ensuring that the arrangements are made for the removal of trash, recyclables, and food scraps and that no public health hazard is created.

## Where can I purchase 5-gallon pails?

Hardware stores often sell buckets, as do some solid waste districts and towns (find at [802recycles.com](http://802recycles.com)). Some restaurants, bakeries, and grocery stores end up with extra buckets and lids that they will give away for free. Websites like [Freecycle](http://Freecycle) and networks like Front Porch Forum sometimes advertise free buckets.

## What if I am worried about bears?

Done correctly, compost rarely attracts bears to a neighborhood—bird seed more commonly attract bears. Barrel/tumbler compost bins are harder for bears to open than open-bottomed bins. Electric fences, placed around the compost bin or totes, deter bears—rub peanut butter or bacon grease on the fence so the bear gets a zap to the nose. If a bear disturbs your compost bin, stop putting food scraps in your bin and bring food scraps to a drop-off for a while. Consider using drop-offs in the spring when bears wake up hungry or all year and storing scraps inside. Learn how to compost in bear country and [keep bears away from food scrap and trash totes](http://keep bears away from food scrap and trash totes) at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/node/260>.

## I can't control my tenants' behavior—am I responsible for the food scraps my tenants put in the trash?

Landlords are not directly responsible for recyclables or food scraps that tenants put in the trash, but they are responsible for assuring that the tenant has access to recycling and food scrap management options, as required by the Vermont Rental Housing Health Code. Landlords should inform tenants of the trash, recycling, and food scraps management systems at the property and teach tenants how to use the systems properly. [In Chittenden County, landlords must](#) educate tenants on proper waste management when tenants first move in and then at least once a year.

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

Pigs may *only* be fed food scraps that have *not* touched meat/fish or their oils/juices. You can read the Guidance on Feeding Food Scraps to Pigs at: [agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/documents/Feeding%20Food%20Scraps%20to%20Pigs%20January%202018.pdf](http://agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/documents/Feeding%20Food%20Scraps%20to%20Pigs%20January%202018.pdf). Chickens may be given any food scraps, including meat.

## Can food scraps be disposed of using in-sink garbage disposals?

Yes, but this is not advised, as septic systems are not designed to handle large amounts of food scraps, particularly oils and grease, so putting them down the drain can clog pipes and lead to a need to pump septic

tanks more often. Food scraps can create costly problems for municipal sewer systems as well. Composting is a better option and reduces the risk of clogs, backups, and sewage releases.

### **If compost facilities sell the compost from food scraps, why do I have to pay them to take it?**

It costs money to collect and haul materials and to turn food scraps into compost. The sale of compost does not cover these costs. Composting costs include machinery, labor, fuel, and other compost ingredients, such as woodchips, that often must be purchased and mixed in with food scraps.

### **I have more questions—how can I get help?**

We are here to help! Contact your local waste district or town at [802recycles.com](http://802recycles.com) or our team at the Vermont DEC (802-828-1138; [anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov](mailto:anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov)). Some local waste districts and towns offer free home composting workshops and sell discounted compost bins. [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com) has lots of great information, including the [Dirt on Compost](#), a guide to composting in a backyard.

## **Hauling FAQs**

On July 1, 2020, trash haulers must offer food scrap collection services to non-residential customers and apartments with four units or more, unless another hauler is willing to provide that service. Fees can vary.

### **What if my building has three units or fewer?**

Your hauler may provide food scrap collection service even though the law does not require it. You can also look up other food scrap haulers at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com). Some haulers are building new pick-up routes, so it can be worthwhile to reach out to regional haulers even if they do not currently list your town in the directory.

### **What if I want to start food scrap collection now, but my hauler doesn't provide this service yet?**

You can find a list of haulers that currently offer food scraps collection service at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com).

### **How much does food scrap collection cost?**

Like trash and recycling service, fees vary. When comparing quotes, consider whether the hauler would clean your containers and how food scrap collection factors into your overall costs. As you remove food scraps from your trash, you may be able to lower your trash fees by reducing your trash dumpster size or number of totes.

Some haulers provide liner bags for bins (it depends on whether the composter accepts them), wash totes, and/or provide wood shavings or other materials to cover food scraps in the bin to contain odors. If you have a choice between haulers, consider what service level is the best fit.

### **Did the law change?**

The Vermont Universal Recycling Law used to require all trash haulers to offer food scrap collection services to their customers starting July 1, 2020, but the Vermont legislature changed that requirement in 2019. The law now only requires haulers to offer food scrap collection to **nonresidential customers** and **apartment buildings with four or more residential units** unless another hauler will provide that service.

*Read the Vermont Rental Housing Health Code at*

[http://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/REG\\_Rental\\_Housing\\_Code.pdf](http://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/REG_Rental_Housing_Code.pdf)

*Learn more about Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, composting, and more at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com) or by calling VT DEC at 802-828-1138.*

