

## For Residents & Small Businesses

## Managing Food Scraps FAQ

Vermont state law prohibits food scraps from being put in the trash (with a few exceptions\*). Residents and small businesses have **three options** for managing their food scraps:

- 1) **Hire a hauler to pick up food scraps.** Many hauling companies collect food scraps, so ask your trash and recycling hauler if they offer this service. Or, find a food scrap hauler at [VTrecycles.com](http://VTrecycles.com). Haulers usually provide small buckets or rolling carts to pick up food scraps. 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 learn more about drop-offs in your area. Fees vary.
- 3) **Compost on-site.** If your home or office has the space and someone is willing to actively manage the bin(s), on-site composting can be an easy option. [Plastic tumblers or open-bottomed compost bins](#) set on top of wire-mesh hardware cloth will deter most pests (learn more about composting in bear country in "[The Dirt on Compost](#)"). \*State law allows residents who compost in their yard to dispose of meat and bones in the trash, so animals aren't attracted to the compost bin.



### What are food scraps?

Food scraps are 1) parts of food that are typically **discarded rather than eaten**: peels, rinds, cores, eggshells, seeds, pits, bones, shells, coffee grounds and filters, loose-leaf tea, and fats/oils/ grease, and 2) food that was **not finished**: "plate scraps" or leftovers that went bad. Any type of food can become food scraps—bread, pasta, soup, vegetables, fruit, sauces, meat, fish, dairy, sweets, etc.

### What should I do with meat and bones?

\*If you compost in your yard, you can put your meat and bones in the trash (the law allows this) or bring them to a food scrap drop-off, so they don't attract animals to your composting bin. If you get your food scraps picked up or bring them to a drop-off, collect your meat and bones with the rest of your food scraps.

### Why did the state ban food scraps from landfills?

Food waste makes up about 20% of Vermont's trash at homes and businesses. 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.

### Is anyone going to enforce the landfill bans?

The Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) has enforcement authority. ANR's outreach and compliance efforts prioritize the largest producers of food waste and ANR responds to complaints. ANR does not sort through trash bags looking for recyclables or food scraps.

### How do I collect food scraps in my kitchen or workplace?

First, collect food scraps in a container. There is no right way to do this. You can buy a food scrap bucket, reuse a large yogurt tub, or keep a plastic bag in the freezer—find a method that works for you based on how much food scrap you generate, how often you want to empty and wash your container, etc. You'll empty your container regularly—into a backyard bin if you [compost at home](#), into a food scrap tote or bucket if you have [pick-up](#), or into a larger container or bucket if you bring scraps to a [drop-off](#).

### Where can I find or purchase a container for my kitchen?

You can repurpose any container you have around, like a large yogurt or coffee tub, or an old bucket (unless it used to hold something hazardous). Some restaurants and grocery stores end up with extra buckets and lids that they will give away for free. Hardware stores often sell buckets and collection containers, as do some solid waste districts and towns (find yours at [802recycles.com](https://802recycles.com)).



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

You can find a [list of haulers that currently offer food scrap collection service](#) at [VTrecycles.com](https://VTrecycles.com). Transfer stations, bag drops, and many compost sites accept food scraps from residents.

### Where can I learn how to compost on-site?

Backyard composting workshops are offered by some solid waste districts and towns—find their info at [802recycles.com](https://802recycles.com). Check out *The Dirt on Compost*, a guide to composting in your yard in Vermont (<https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wmp/SolidWaste/Documents/Universal-Recycling/The-Dirt-on-Compost.pdf>), take the [VT Master Composter Course](#), explore the other resources on the [food scraps page](#) of [VTrecycles.com](https://VTrecycles.com), or contact VT DEC with questions at 802-828-1138.



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

Only food scraps that have not touched meat or fish, or their oils or juices may be fed to pigs (unless it's food scraps from your own house fed to your own pigs). Learn more at [agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/documents/Feeding%20Food%20Scraps%20to%20Pigs%20January%202018.pdf](https://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 I put my food scraps down an in-sink garbage disposal?

Yes, but this is not advised, as pipes and 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 also create costly problems for municipal sewer systems. Composting is a better option and reduces the risk of clogs, backups, and sewage releases.

### What if I am worried about bears?

Bird seed commonly attracts bears to a neighborhood in the first place, so be sure to bring bird feeders and seed inside when there is <1 foot of snow on the ground. 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 storing scraps inside and using drop-offs, especially in the spring when bears wake up hungry. It's important to compost strategically in bear country. Learn how to compost in bear country and [keep bears away from food scrap and trash totes](#) at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/node/260>.

### I live in a condo association. Will the association have to provide a food scrap service?

This is not required, but some associations choose to provide the service. It is up to the association and

residents to decide how they want to manage food scraps, whether that's individually or collectively, via a pick-up or on-site (if there are people committed to managing an onsite composting system), etc.

### **I rent my home. My landlord provides my trash and recycling service. Do they have to provide service for my food scraps as well? Will they give me a collection container?**

The [Vermont Department of Health's Rental Housing Health Code](#) requires landlords to assure arrangements are made for the removal of food scraps from rentals and provide durable and water-tight receptacles for food scraps that are stored outside. Commercial landlords are not required to provide this service. Learn more in the [Managing Food Scraps at Rentals FAQ](#), found on the [food scraps webpage](#) of [VTrecycles.com](#).

### **How do I keep my food scraps from smelling?**

If you empty your kitchen container at least weekly, keep a lid on it, and wash it when it is empty, you will probably not have issues with smell. If you notice a smell, empty it more often and/or cover your scraps with a handful or two of sawdust, wood shavings, dry leaves, or other dry plant material to contain odors. Put some in the bottom of the container to absorb liquids and make the container easier to clean.

### **What if fruit flies fly around my kitchen container in the summer?**

Whether you compost or not, fruit flies appear in the summer. To make a fly trap, pour a splash of sweet liquid, like red wine vinegar or old wine, in a jar, add a couple drops of dish soap, and make a funnel from a piece of paper or cardstock. Set the funnel in the jar and put the jar next to your food scrap container. Make another one to keep by your fruit.



### **Can I use compostable bags to keep my container clean?**

It depends where your scraps end up. Ask your hauler or composter if they accept compostable bags. 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, so composters must be careful about which they accept (some only accept [BPI certified](#) compostable bags). Some composters may accept paper bags or newspaper liners.

### **Our large, outdoor food scrap cart gets maggots in the summer. Can we do anything about this?**

When it is warm out, cover food scraps with several inches of dry brown plant material (e.g., wood shavings, sawdust, etc.) or coffee grounds to hold in smells and slow down insects.

### **How much does curbside food scrap pick-up cost?**

Like trash and recycling, service options and fees vary. For example, some food scrap haulers provide and pick up small buckets, while others use rolling carts (like those used for trash and recycling), and fees vary based on the number of containers picked up. Sometimes neighbors share a rolling cart and the cost.

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

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! You can contact your local waste district or town at [802recycles.com](#) or the Vermont DEC at 802-828-1138 or [anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov](mailto:anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov). Learn more at [VTrecycles.com](#).

