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Drop-Off Composting Tips

By Nancy Knox, Vermont Master Composter and Extension Master Gardener

Since July of 2020, Vermont’s Universal Recycling law (Act 148) has banned the disposal of food scraps in the trash or landfills. “Why? Keeping food scraps out of the trash saves landfill space and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing food waste saves resources. Food donation has nearly tripled since the law was passed.” – VT ANR DEC Food Scrap Ban Guidance webpage.

What are the options for food scrap disposal for Vermont residents?

- Backyard composting
- Anaerobic digestion
- Pick up by local solid waste or dedicated compost hauler
- Donation to local food banks (edible food) or farms for animal feed
- Drop-off composting (focus of this article)

What are ‘food scraps’ and what other materials can be composted? Food scraps are pre- and post-consumer food waste derived from processing or discarding of food. Compostable materials include:

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags (paper only) & loose tea
- Eggs and egg shells
- Bread pasta, rice and grains
- Meat, bones, shellfish and seafood
- Cheese and dairy
- Soups and sauces
- Oils and fats
- Spoiled foods



In addition, the following materials are compostable with drop-off composting:

- Certified, clearly labeled compostable bags used for lining food scrap containers (confirm with your local Solid Waste District)
- Coffee filters & tea bags (paper only)
- Newspaper and untreated paper bags used to line food scrap containers
- Paper towels and napkins – only if they do not contain body fluids or chemicals of any kind
- Wooden or bamboo stirrers, toothpicks (no plastic frills), chopsticks
- Uncoated paper leaf bags

Materials NOT accepted (check with your Solid Waste District to confirm):

- Produce stickers – make sure you remove them prior to peeling fruit or vegetables
- Food containers (even if marked ‘compostable’)
- Plastic products of any kind
- Twist ties
- Human or pet waste

How does drop-off composting work? Drop-off composting is the process where we collect food scraps at home and take them to a solid waste drop off center in a local community, where bins are provided for collecting these materials prior to large scale composting.

IN THE KITCHEN: Identify a dedicated container for your food scraps. Containers may include plastic, metal or ceramic countertop buckets with tops. These are available at local or online retailers. You can also use a reusable plastic food container such as a yogurt tub. Lining your container with a compostable bag makes it easier to deal with when you’re ready to take them out of the kitchen. Many grocery stores have compostable bags available for bagging produce. For a budget option you can use ziplock or other plastic bags to store your food waste. As you prep vegetables, fruit and eggs, etc. for a meal, put the peelings in the container or bag. Meat bones and fish by-products and other potentially smelly foods are best stored in a bag or container in your freezer until you are ready to take them out of the house. You can also store spoiled food of all types in your freezer until you are ready to remove them with your kitchen compost. Be sure to label your compost containers and let those in your household know your system.

STORING COMPOST PRIOR TO DROP-OFF COMPOSTING: If you have a porch, basement or garage where you can store a larger bucket for compost, you can add to it for several days before needing to drop it off. Many of the state’s Solid Waste Districts sell 4 or 5 gallon buckets for this purpose. Again, lining the bucket with a paper or plastic and/or compostable bag (13 gallon size) helps keep the container clean and makes for easier drop-off. Make sure to keep the lid on tight to discourage animals, especially if you have pets or store your bucket where wild animals can find it.

DROPPING OFF YOUR COMPOST: When your bucket is full, you’re ready to drop off your compost. Go online to find your local solid waste district transfer station or drop-off center (see Resources below). **Check the days and hours the facility is open**, and confirm that they take compost. At most drop-off centers, if you also drop off your trash, you won’t need to pay for your compost. If you are just dropping off compost, you will need to pay \$1 per 5 gallon bucket (may vary per Solid Waste District).

Pros of drop off composting:

- Wider range of accepted materials
- Doable with no outside storage
- Manageable for renters
- Best for people who live and/or work near SWD drop-off centers

Cons of drop off composting:

- Drop off locations not convenient for all
- Limited hours and days at drop off centers
- Recent restrictions for food containers – no longer allowed for drop-off.

Resources:

- <https://dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/materials-mgmt/organic-materials>
- <https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/wmp/SolidWaste/Documents/Universal-Recycling/Food-Scrap-Ban-Guidance.pdf>
- Local solid waste districts: <https://dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/local-districts>

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