

FAQs

Food Scrap Collection at Food Establishments

Below are Frequently Asked Questions about Vermont’s Universal Recycling Law. This law bans disposal of all food scraps by July 1, 2020 and requires food establishments to safely manage excess food and food scraps for donation, animal feed, or composting.

Q: Why is it bad to put food scraps in the trash?

A: When organic materials, like food and food scraps, end up in a landfill they give off methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. The resources and nutrients in the food scraps are buried and will never be used again. When organic materials are *composted*, they do *not* produce methane and their nutrients are recovered and turned into a beneficial soil amendment. By composting food scraps, you reduce the impacts of climate change, save landfill space, and promote the re-use of valuable resources.

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

A: Yes, provided the collection, storage and (if applicable) on-site composting of food scraps does not create a nuisance or public health hazard and meets the requirements of the Health Department’s *Health Regulations for Food Service Establishments*, section 5-213 “Garbage and Refuse Disposal”. Plus, removing food scraps from trash can reduce odor and pest issues at food establishments.

Q: What do I do with food scraps if I’m not putting them in my trash?

A: Most food establishments contract with a hauler to collect food scraps and take them to a composting facility. Find a hauler on the [Statewide Directory of Food Scrap Haulers](#) (see Resources). Your hauler can provide secure collection bins for outside food scrap storage. Food scrap pickup should occur at least once per week, especially during warmer months to avoid creating a public health hazard or nuisance.

Inside restaurants, five-gallon or smaller buckets work well to collect food scraps near prep and dishwashing stations as they are easy to clean, don’t get too heavy, and can be easily emptied into outside collection bins. Buckets should be cleaned in a dishwasher or by hand at the end of each shift.

You can compost food scraps on-site only if you meet the Department of Environmental Conservation’s requirements and the Health Department regulations cited above. See Resources for assistance.

Q: How can I keep food scrap bins from creating odors and attracting flies and pests?

A: Keep all indoor food scrap collection bins clean. Empty and clean *indoor* collection containers, like 5-gallon buckets, at the end of each shift. Some haulers offer container cleaning services for outdoor collection bins, while others use compostable liner bags. You may need to clean your bins or provide your own liner bags depending on your hauler’s services. Always keep the area around your food scrap containers clean.

Put sawdust on top of food scraps at the end of each day. Adding 2-3 inches of sawdust, wood shavings, coffee grounds or leaves to cover food waste will help avoid odors and flies and soak up excess liquid. Some haulers provide sawdust to customers for this use.

All outside containers must be leak-proof with tight-fitting lids or covers. If space permits, consider storing collection containers in a shed or cooler at night (ensure the container is covered and well-labeled).

Q: Where can I put outdoor food scrap collection bins?

A: Food scrap bins can be kept next to trash bins where they are accessible and won't create the potential for flies to enter the food establishment. In summer, it may be best to keep bins away from the building. In the winter, it may be better to locate them closer so they are not damaged by snow plows.

Q: Will compost facilities take meat, bones, seafood and dairy products?

A: Permitted food scrap haulers accept all food scraps including meat, bones, fish, seafood shells, and all dairy. Check with your hauler or compost facility for other specific items they accept. Provide training and signage for your employees of what can and cannot go into food scrap collection containers. See Resources for a link to compost bin signs.

Q: Can I put compostable coffee cups or compostable utensils in the food scrap bins?

A: Check with your hauler or the compost facility that receives your food scraps. Currently, most commercial compost facilities do not accept compostable products. Facilities that do accept these items have strict requirements to ensure that the products are compostable and easy to distinguish from non-compostable products.

Q: Can I feed food scraps to pigs?

A: Vermont law bans the feeding of prohibited food waste to swine or supplying prohibited food waste to others to feed to swine. The purpose of this law is to prevent the introduction into Vermont of economically devastating foreign animal diseases, such as Swine Vesicular Disease. Pigs are only allowed to be fed food scraps that *do not contain meat or fish* and have not come into contact with any meat or fish. If your establishment sells or serves meat or fish-containing products of any kind, you will have to ensure no contact is made with the food scraps separated for pigs. See Resources for assistance.

RESOURCES**Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Solid Waste Program**

802-828-1138 or vtrecycles.com – click on “Organics”

Food Scraps, Recycling, and Trash Bin signs available for free download at:

dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/universal-recycling/universal-recycling-symbols

Vermont Statewide Directory of Food Scrap Haulers

dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/FoodScrapHaulersSTATEWIDELIST.pdf

Vermont Department of Health – Health Regulations for Food Service Establishments

802-863-7221 or 800-439-8550 (toll-free within VT)

healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2016/11/ENV_FL_FoodServiceRegs2016.pdf

Reference Sections 5-213 and 5-214

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets – Animal Health Regulations

802-828-2421 or agriculture.vermont.gov/animal_health/animal_regulations

Local Solid Waste Management Entities Responsible for Education and Outreach Support

dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/local-districts