

Managing Food Scraps at Condos FAQ

Starting July 1, 2020, food scraps cannot go in the trash in Vermont—including at condos.

Condos and HOAs are not required to hire or provide a food scrap management service for members, but residents must keep food scraps separate from the trash after July 1. Many associations choose to manage food scraps cooperatively to make it easier and/or cheaper for everyone. Residents and associations have **three main options**:

- 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 or, find a food scrap hauler at VTrecycles.com. Haulers usually provide and pick up using either 5-gallon buckets (for one or two households) or rolling carts (that a community shares). 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 to learn about drop-offs in your area. Fees vary.
- 3) **Compost or digest in the backyard.** If residents have the space and someone is willing to actively manage the bin(s), backyard composting or digesting can be an easy option. [Plastic 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](#)"). *Even after the July 1 ban on putting food scraps in the trash, state law allows residents that compost or digest food scraps in their yard to dispose of meat and bones in the trash.

Do you have any tips for starting food scrap collection in our community?

Make sure all residents understand which materials your food scrap hauler or drop-off accept. 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. If residents compost on-site, remind them that meat and bones should not go in the backyard bin, as they can attract animals (these meat and bones can go in the trash or to a compost drop-off).



Similar to recycling, everyone benefits from clear directions on what to put in food scrap collection bins.

1. Explain the food scrap collection system to all residents, including: their responsibility to collect food scraps in their home, what is and is not allowed in the food scrap bin, and the collection schedule. Remind residents each year and check in to see if they have questions. If people put items in the wrong place, send them reminders about the system. If you see trash in the food scrap bin, be sure to remove it and remind everyone that it does not belong there and will contaminate the compost.
2. 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. Your hauler may also 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 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.

I can't control my neighbors' behavior—is our Association responsible for what they put in the trash?

Condo and home owner associations are not directly responsible for recyclables or food scraps that residents put in the trash, but neighbors helping neighbors can be a good way to teach new waste management habits.

Where can we find or purchase containers for our kitchens?

You can repurpose any container you have around, like a large yogurt or coffee tub, or an old bucket. 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).



How much does food scrap collection cost?

Like trash and recycling service, fees vary. When comparing quotes, consider whether the hauler would empty and/or 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 and keep insects out. If you have a choice between haulers, consider what service level is the best fit.

Where can I learn how to compost in my yard?

Some solid waste districts and towns offer free backyard composting workshops—find their info at 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>) or contact VT DEC with questions at 802-828-1138.



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. Transfer stations, bag drops, and many compost sites accept food scraps from residents.

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. 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. 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.

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 residential trash bags looking for recyclables or food scraps.

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.

What if I am worried about bears?

Done correctly, compost rarely attracts bears to a neighborhood—bird feeders 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 food scrap tote, deter bears—rub peanut butter or bacon grease on the fence so the bear gets zapped on 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. Get tips for [composting in bear country](#) and [keeping bears away from food scrap totes](#) at [VTrecycles.com](#).

Can we do anything to deter insects in the outside cart in the summer?

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.

I have more questions—how can I get help?

We are here to help! Learn more at [VTrecycles.com](#). Or, contact your local waste district or town at [802recycles.com](#) or our team at the Vermont DEC (802-828-1138; anr.scrapfoodwaste@vermont.gov).

