



Food Waste Separation Made Easy

This food waste separation guidance document is part of a series aimed at helping commercial food service providers – e.g., restaurants, hotels, corporate cafeterias, and schools – reduce the volume of organic waste they send to landfills.

There are a number of options for diverting food waste from landfills. All of these strategies are more effective when generators have systems in place for separating out organic material from landfill-bound waste.

Prevention should always be the top priority but the most successful diversion programs employ strategies across the hierarchy. See the other tip sheets in this series for guidance on [food waste reduction](#) and [food donation](#).





I. Kitchen Separation

Source separation of food scraps starts in kitchens and dish rooms.

Recommended back of house practices:

- Collect **kitchen food scraps** in dedicated receptacles such as bowls, buckets and barrels in the same area as trash is currently collected.
- **Containers** should be leak proof and covered when not in continuous use, or when full. They must be intended only for the purpose of food scraps collection and clearly marked.
- Remove **food scraps** from the kitchen/dish room at the same frequency as trash is removed from these areas.

Back of house practices are dependent on the volume produced. Collection at the same frequency as trash is reasonable for most establishments and seasons; in others, food waste should be collected as often as necessary to keep the area sanitary and to prevent odor and vermin. At a minimum, collection should be every shift. Once collected, food scraps will be brought to a storage area near the trash dumpster/compactor where the hauler will pickup the material.

View the following [instructional video](#) featuring University of Massachusetts-Amherst to learn more about source separation of food scraps.

II. Hauler Collection & Frequencies

As a rule, food scraps should be collected by the haulers at a frequency that minimizes odor, insects, vectors and other pests. Collection frequency will vary based on hauler routes, truck capabilities, collection container types, and the generation rate of these materials. In some cases, variations on the below recommended practices should be agreed upon between the health department, food establishment and hauler.

Dumpsters and Carts:

Typical sizes used for food scraps collection include 64-gallon wheeled carts and dumpsters of 2, 4, 6, and 8 yard sizes.

- In summer (April-September) it is recommended that food scraps collected in wheeled carts or dumpsters be hauled away for processing twice per week.
- In winter (October-March) it is recommended that food scraps collected in wheeled carts or dumpsters be hauled away for processing once per week.

Certain situations may dictate the need for more frequent removal, such as proximity of the collection container to other establishments and the type of food waste generated. Most establishments will be fine with a 2x/week collection, while high-odor generators such as seafood restaurants may need to collect more frequently.

Compactors:

Usually 20 yards or more, compactors are used by large food waste generators that also have the space to site a container of this size at their facility. A self-contained compactor typically has a chute with a door leading from a loading dock or from the inside of a building to feed it and has no area open to the air.

- In summer (April-September), it is recommended that food waste collected in compactors be hauled away for processing once per week.
- In winter (October-March) it is recommended that food waste collected in compactors be hauled away for processing once per week.

Location of the compactor relative to sun exposure may affect hauling need frequency. The condition of the compactor should be checked regularly for leaks or rusting. If the compactor has an open chute leading directly from the inside of the building, odors may create problems inside the establishment. Compactors should be emptied as often as necessary to keep the area clean, sanitary and free of odors and insects. Extending the time frequency of pick up should be agreed upon by the establishment, hauler and health department.





III. Outdoor Storage Practices

Type and location of containers will vary. There is also considerable variability in local trash area requirements and space availability, especially between dense urban centers and less dense or space constrained areas.

- **Storage:** Outdoor storage surfaces should be nonabsorbent (concrete or asphalt), smooth, and durable and sloped to drain. Some communities require trash/recycling areas to be fenced in or otherwise out of view. It is best for businesses/institutions to check with the local health department to determine if this is required. The storage area must be maintained in good repair, clearly marked with no-parking signs, easily cleanable and if necessary/possible, enclosed by fencing to contain wind-blown litter. The area should be free of food debris, residue, and unnecessary clutter.
- **Container Maintenance:** Dumpsters, carts or compactors should be closable and cleanable, leak-free, water tight and capable of being locked. All doors/hatches/tight-fitting lids should be closed or in place when not in immediate use to prevent pests from entering the container. Plastic bags and wet strength paper bags may be used to line closed outside receptacles.
- **Cleanliness:** Carts, dumpsters, compactors and other bins should be cleaned often enough to prevent odor and other pest/vector attractions. High pressure pumps, hot water, steam and detergent are cleaning materials that should be used as necessary.

Signage

- All receptacles should be clearly labeled for their intended purposes - i.e. food scraps, recycling, trash.
- Signs should be **picture-based with minimal words**, and should include pictures of what can and cannot be put in the receptacle. Haulers may be able to provide signage.
 - Ideally, pictures should be tailored for the generator, showing examples of waste that is actually generated at the site.

Training

- **Train all staff** in new sorting and waste separation practices, and incorporate training into onboarding processes for new employees.
- **Monitor contamination levels** in each receptacle - or ask haulers to do so - and use instances of contamination to remind staff about separation guidelines.
- **Provide periodic “refreshers”** on source separation and waste management guidelines and goals. Consider appointing staff members to be in charge of monitoring and training peers.





CET (formerly The Center for EcoTechnology) helps people and businesses save energy and reduce waste. CET acts as a catalyst to accelerate the development of a vibrant marketplace to divert wasted food from the commercial and institutional sectors. We have been a leader in the wasted food reduction and diversion movement for more than 20 years, implementing some of the first wasted food composting programs in the country, and contributing to effective public policy.

We believe that better managing wasted food is critical in order to address climate change, feed more hungry people, and grow our economy. If you are a city, state or federal agency, industry group or foundation, and want to tackle the issue of wasted food, please contact us!

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