

Green cart/bin program FAQ

Q: I thought dairy, meat, and bones can't be composted?

A: Dairy, meat, and bones are not traditionally composted in backyard compost piles because the temperatures do not get high enough to kill foodborne pathogens or break them down very quickly. However, [all food scraps and yard debris](#) can now go into the curbside green bin because these materials are taken to large industrial composting facilities. Industrial compost piles can be as high as 8 to 10 feet with average temperatures between 135 F to 160 F, which is when decomposition is fastest. Your food scraps can be transformed into finished compost in a matter of weeks or months.

Q: Can I use compostable or biodegradable plastic bags to collect my food scraps?

A: No, please do not place any compostable or biodegradable plastic bags, utensils, cups, plates, or items into your green bin; the composting facilities do not accept them. Many of these items are marketed as compostable, but they are not really because product labeling laws are difficult to enforce, and they may still be made out of petroleum-based plastic.

Even if the bag or item is certified, compostable plastic items are considered "synthetic materials", which are prohibited in compost that is supposed to be certified USDA Organic. Contamination with compostable plastic can cause the compost facilities to lose their USDA Organic certification so that they can no longer sell to organic farmers. Please place all compostable plastic items in the grey trash bin and only food scraps and yard debris into the green bin.

Q: Where do the food scraps and yard debris in the green cart go after it's picked up?

A: All food scraps and yard debris are currently trucked to 4 composting facilities located in the Counties of Marin, Mendocino, Napa, and Contra Costa. The names of the facilities are below, respectively:

- WM Earthcare
- Cold Creek Compost
- Napa Recycling
- West Contra Costa Facility

Q: When will the new composting facility be built in Sonoma County?

A: As of April 2024, the County has partnered with Zero Waste Sonoma to develop a potential new compost facility to be built on top of a closed landfill next to the Sonoma County Airport. Until then, all food scraps and yard debris will continue to be trucked out of county for composting as it is the most cost-efficient option.

Q: Are compostable or biodegradable doggie bags better for the environment?

A: Not really. Compostable plastic bags and other items are water and energy intensive to manufacture, and they are only better than regular plastic if they are actually composted. Since dog poop and compostable plastic items are **not** accepted at the local composting facilities, they have to be thrown into the garbage. Compostable plastic items require oxygen, heat, and moisture to decompose, and since all garbage goes into the landfill, where there is no oxygen or heat, the compostable plastic does not break down. These same reasons apply to compostable diapers.

Q: Can I compost dog/cat/pet/animal poop?

A: No, all pet waste must be thrown into the garbage. There are harmful and parasitic bacteria in pet waste that can contaminate the compost, especially when people use it for their gardens to grow food. However, there are some outlets for horse or cattle manure listed on this page:

<https://zerowastesonoma.gov/materials/manure>

Q: How do I keep my green cart and/or indoor food scraps collection container from smelling and attracting flies or other pests?

A: Whenever possible, try to layer “brown” materials such as dry leaves, newspaper, paper egg cartons, or delivery pizza boxes in between food scraps. These materials will help absorb moisture and increase airflow, which will reduce odors. With less odor, fruit flies and other pests are more likely to stay away. Try placing these “brown” materials at the bottom of your green bin or indoor food scraps collection container. Food-soiled paper towels and napkins are also great alternatives. However, you may still need or want to wash out your green cart or collection container regularly with some water. Your garbage hauling company may also switch out your cart once or twice a year with a clean one.

Q: What can I do if I live in an apartment, condominium, or in a rural area where I don't have access to a curbside green bin?

A: There is a state law called SB 1383 in effect since 2022 that requires all residents and businesses to separate organic materials such as food scraps and plant trimmings from the garbage so that they may be composted instead. All apartments and condominiums must offer a green collection cart/bin for residents to use in addition to recycling and garbage bins. More information can be found at www.zerowastesonoma.gov/sb1383

For residents living in extremely rural areas with no access to regular waste collection service, backyard composting or vermicomposting are good options. Videos on how to set up your own system can be found here: <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/home-composting>

Q: Is the compost at compost giveaway events organic?

A: Yes, they are USDA organic and CDFA listed. Events posted on: <https://zerowastesonoma.gov/compost-giveaways>