

Commercial Composting & Biodegradable Plastics

Why we care

Composting food scraps reduces methane production in landfills, returns nutrients to the soil, and can even produce energy. The environmental benefits are great – especially when done at a commercial level. Currently, food collection programs in buildings in the Portland Metro area also accept paper, cardboard, and “compostable” plastics. However, the facilities that process the organics can no longer handle the increasing amount of non-food items. Beginning later this year, cardboard, paper, and compostable plastics will be banned from commercial composting programs. *Residential programs will remain as they are.*

Simple, positive steps

Be aware that these plastics must go into the trash.

- *Bioplastics* are made from plant materials, rather than petroleum.
- *Degradable plastic* means the product will break down in the presence of heat, light, and/or oxygen. Most are petroleum-based with an additive that causes them to fragment.
- *Biodegradable plastic* means the item will degrade with naturally occurring microorganisms. The product could be plant or petroleum-based. However, there is no requirement for how long it takes to biodegrade.
- *Compostable plastic* means the item will biodegrade into carbon dioxide, water, and humus at a rate comparable with paper.

Avoid purchasing the plastics listed above.

- These items cannot be recycled, are difficult to distinguish from regular plastics, and create problems at recycling facilities.
- They also cause problems at composting facilities because they don't always degrade fast enough. No one wants bits of plastic in their finished compost.

Switch to washable cups, plates, and utensils at home and work.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.