

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) For Food Waste Recycling Program for Residents

1. What laws require food waste recycling?

SB 1383 is a state law aimed at reducing the amount of organic waste, including food waste, sent to landfills by 75% statewide and to recover 20% of edible food statewide that would otherwise be sent to landfills. SB 1383 requires all businesses, multi-family properties, and residents to subscribe to organic waste collection services. The regulations become effective January 1, 2022.

2. What is food waste?

Food waste includes meat, bones, poultry, seafood, shells, dairy, eggs, pasta, grains, coffee grounds, fruits, vegetables, and other inedible and edible parts of food.

3. What is organic waste?

When referring to SB 1383 requirements, organic waste include yard waste, food waste, and plant fibers such as paper and cardboard. All of these materials are currently recycled across the City in some capacity. Single family homes have curbside yard waste collection service AND existing state law, Assembly Bill 1826, requires large generating businesses such as restaurants and hotels and others to recycle food and yard waste. Paper and cardboard are also recycled city-wide in curbside and commercial recycling programs.

One thing to note - In the recycling business, the term “organic waste” or “organics” has a meaning different from the term “organic” in farming. In farming, an “organic” product is one grown without chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics, or pesticides.

4. How do I separate my food waste?

You can collect your food waste in a small container (kitchen pail with a lid or tupperware) in your kitchen and store it on your countertop or under your sink. You can line your food waste container with a plastic bag, which can be tied off and placed in your yard waste container. You can also store your food waste in a bag in your freezer, which can help avoid odors for certain foods that are not meant to be left at room temperature.

Residents can obtain a kitchen pail on a first-come basis at the Public Works Department, along with information on how to properly manage food waste.

Bagged food waste needs to be tied off and placed into the yard waste container.

5. Can I place my food waste directly in my yard waste container without bagging it?

NO. All food waste must be bagged and tied before being placed in the yard waste container. Food waste that is placed directly in the yard waste bin will contaminate the yard waste bin.

After collection, the bagged food waste will be separated at Gold Cost Recycling and Transfer Station, and sent for processing at local facilities. Material sent to these facilities must be clean and free of other debris as it will be processed and turned into organic fertilizer or renewable energy. Due to the need for clean organic material, comingled organic material (green waste and food waste together) will not be accepted at this time.

6. Isn't using plastic bags counterproductive?

The decision to bag food waste at this time was not made without considerable debate and was selected based on lower cost of service and reduced environmental footprint. While the use of bags seems counterintuitive, one of the alternative approaches is adding a fourth cart dedicated to food waste only. A fourth cart would need a fourth truck route and additional drivers. This would mean additional emissions from the extra truck on the road and additional costs of service. Additionally, many of our residents are space constrained and would not be able to participate as easily in this program with a fourth cart. The other alternative approach is mixing yard waste and food waste. This approach is not viable at this time, as the City is constrained by the processing abilities of our local facilities. In our case, our local facilities cannot yet handle food and yard waste mixed together.

The bagged food waste material will be placed into the existing yard waste container, separated at Gold Cost Recycling and Transfer Station, and sent for processing at local facilities. Material sent to these facilities must be clean and free of other debris as it will be processed and turned into organic fertilizer or renewable energy. Due to the need for clean organic material, commingled organic material (which is when yard waste and food waste are mixed together) will not be accepted at this local facility. If we wanted to mix the two without bags, we would have to haul our food waste to the Central Valley which would again, add additional vehicle miles and emissions, outweighing the environmental benefits of the program.

Ultimately, we're looking to develop a program where food waste and yard waste can be comingled with soiled paper and other bio-based materials. There is a local facility known as the Limoneira facility, being permitted that will be able to accept comingled material. When the Limoneira organics processing facility is complete, we will be able to improve our program and eliminate the need for bagging food waste. Until then, City staff have determined that this short-term solution is the most responsible choice for our community and the environment at large.

7. Do the bags have to be made of plastic?

The City of Ojai's waste hauler, EJ Harrison, and processing facility, Mountainview in Oxnard, both require using plastic bags to separate food waste, which need to be tied off and placed in the yard waste container. Paper bags are not allowed, as food waste will leak through the paper bag and contaminate the yard waste. At Mountainview, the food waste bags will be opened to remove the food waste, and the empty bags will be landfilled. Mountainview does not have the ability to process bags that are labeled "compostable" and all empty food waste bags, even compostable bags, will be landfilled.

The best option is to reuse any plastic bags that you already have like plastic bread bags, food packaging bags, or plastic grocery bags, to collect your food waste.

While the use of plastic may seem counterintuitive, this program complies with SB 1383, reduces the amount of organic material that is sent to the landfill, and reduces our methane emissions with the lowest impact on cost and space constraints for City of Ojai residents.

In the future, we would like to move towards a circular program without plastic, where food waste and green waste can be comingled with soiled paper and other bio-based materials. When the Limonera organics processing facility is complete, we will be able to improve our program and eliminate the need for bagging food waste.

8. What happens to the bag of food waste after it's collected?

Once placed into the existing yard waste container, the bagged food waste material will be separated at Gold Coast Recycling and Transfer Station and sent for processing at the new Mountainview facility in Oxnard. Material sent to Mountainview must be clean and free of other debris as it will be processed and turned into organic fertilizer or renewable energy.

9. Can I add compostable materials, like compostable plates, cups, utensils and napkins, to my yard waste bin?

NO. Currently, our local processing facility, Mountainview in Oxnard, does not accept compostable food ware, such as compostable plates, cups, utensils, or napkins. If these items are added to the bagged food waste or loose yard waste material, it will contaminate the material. While these items might be labeled "compostable", these items should be disposed of in the landfill.

When the Limoneira organics processing facility is complete, we will be able to improve our program to include compostable food ware and other bio-based materials. We will publicize these changes as they happen.

10. Will separating food waste cause odor or pests?

Separating your food waste should not cause odor or attract pests any more than putting food scraps in your trash. The same materials are being collected, just in a different container.

11. What if I already have a backyard compost bin at home?

Backyard composting is a great option to divert waste from the landfill, avoid the environmental impacts of transporting organic waste, and create a finished product that you can use in your garden, however, some types of food waste such as meat, bones, seafood, grains, snack foods, and citrus are not ideal for a backyard compost bin, but these items can be processed through the food waste recycling program. Any food waste that does not go in your backyard compost bin must be bagged and placed in your yard waste bin.