

Homes & Real Estate

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Make sure food waste is part of home's recycling plan

Many Seattle-area residents enthusiastically recycle food scraps every day, while a few folks still say, "Yuck, that's gross."

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

Recycling food scraps at home doesn't have to be a love-it or hate-it proposition.

Many Seattle-area residents enthusiastically recycle food scraps every day, while a few folks still say, "Yuck, that's gross."

But it isn't any grosser than throwing food scraps in your garbage. If you're a skeptic, it's time to reconsider. If you already recycle your food scraps, we'll offer a few tips to make it even easier.

Food waste doesn't actually get "recycled." That's just a shorthand way to describe the separated collection and then the composting of food scraps. In our region, residents of most single-family households, and some apartments and condos, can put all food scraps (plus food-soiled paper such as napkins) in a yard-waste or food-waste cart.

The next stop is a composting facility. Combined yard and food waste gets turned into a product that looks like soil, but is even better. This nutrient-rich compost helps yards and gardens; large-scale landscaping and construction projects also benefit from using massive quantities of compost.

Food waste matters because we generate so much. Even now, with all the waste being collected, food still makes up 20 percent of residential waste going to the landfill, according to a recent King County study.

If you want to stop putting food scraps in the garbage like you always have, your new system needs to be convenient for everyone in the household. Buy a plastic, ceramic or stainless steel container to set on the kitchen countertop to collect food scraps.

Compostable bags (they look like plastic) make this system even easier. For a standard 1-gallon countertop container, use 2.5-, 2.6- or 3-gallon bags. These are available in boxes of 20 or 25 for \$5 to \$9. Make sure you don't accidentally buy 13-gallon bags, unless you need them that large. Use only bags labeled as compostable food waste or food scrap bags.

When the bag fills up, simply twist the top tight and take it out to your yard-waste cart. Keep the bag in the container as you carry it through the house, in case the bag leaks.

If you don't want to buy the plastic-looking compostable bags, you can reuse brown paper bags, or wrap food scraps in newspaper. Some people store food scraps in their freezer, labeled, until they are ready to take them outside.

Don't pour gooey food waste directly into your yard-waste cart unless leaves or grass or a layer of newspaper are in there to absorb it.

Those little grocery-store stickers on fruits and vegetables should be removed so they don't end up in the compost. One trick to make sure you remember to remove the stickers is to take them all off as soon as you get home from the grocery store. Kids love to help with this job.

When you have something smelly like fish in the food-waste container, take that load outside early, just like you would with garbage. Countertop food-waste collection containers rarely stink, and many include simple systems such as carbon filters to reduce odors.

Consider making your own compost from food waste, using a worm bin or burying vegetable scraps in the garden.

You can generate less food waste — and save money while you're at it — by the way you buy, store and prepare food. King County's Recyclefood.com website offers resources on all aspects of dealing with food waste. You'll find food-waste prevention tips and videos on the "Food: Too Good to Waste" page.

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