

Recycle Food. It's Easy To Do.



King County Food Scrap Recycling

F.A.Q.

Can I recycle food scraps and food-soiled paper where I Live?

That depends on where you live! Most areas in King County now have the service available. Check with [your city or waste hauler](#) to find out the specifics of what you can put in, how often it is collected, and tips to help you manage the food scraps in your kitchen.

Isn't food biodegradable – why do I need to recycle it?

Nearly 30% of the residential waste that ends up in the King County landfill is food scraps and food-soiled paper. That is more than all the recyclable plastic, paper, glass and metal currently in the garbage waste stream.

Recycling food scraps and food-soiled paper saves landfill costs and helps postpone the need for more landfill space. By recycling your food scraps and food soiled paper in the yard waste bin, instead of putting them in the garbage can, you help extend the life of our landfill.

Putting food scraps and food-soiled paper in the yard waste cart removes organic waste from the garbage waste stream. This diversion of organics offers a number of advantages beyond extending landfill life, such as reducing the concentration and toxicity of leachate (the water that comes out of landfill that has to be treated), and reducing the amount of methane gas produced, (a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming that results when food scraps break down in landfill conditions where there is no oxygen. While nearly all of the methane at the King County landfill is captured through an extensive network of underground pipes, it's still better to not have been produced in the first place!).

Finally food scraps are a valuable resource! All the food scraps and food-soiled paper that are recycled and put in the yard waste cart, instead of the garbage can, get turned into nutrient-rich compost. This compost, in turn, helps you [build healthy soil](#) for plants, crops, landscapes and neighborhood parks.

What happens to the food scraps and food soiled paper that I recycle?

All the food scraps, food-soiled paper and yard waste collected in King County is taken to local, privately owned [Cedar Grove Composting](#) and turned into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. This compost is used in neighborhood landscapes and parks, and is available for purchase at home and garden stores.

Who pays for the food scrap and food soiled paper recycling service?

Residents pay for yard waste collection as part of their garbage service fee or as an additional service fee which they sign up for with their garbage hauler depending on where they live in King County. If you have curbside yard waste collection, adding food scraps and food soiled paper to your yard waste does not cost extra. The fee charged by your garbage hauler offsets the cost of collection. Their expenses include transportation and labor.

The garbage hauling company pays the compost facility to take the yard waste plus food scraps and food soiled paper. This feedstock is made into compost at local, privately owned and operated Cedar Grove Composting. Cedar Grove Composting has designed and built a state of the art composting facility. Cedar Grove Composting sells their compost product in a retail stores throughout the Puget Sound region. Recycling food scraps and food soiled paper makes sense because disposal is always more expensive than recycling. Recycling turns a waste into a resource.

Can I put meat and dairy products in my bin?

Outside of the City of Seattle, most cities in the County that offer food scrap recycling, allow meat, fish, poultry and dairy products. It's a good idea to check with your city or waste hauler to make sure these items are acceptable in your program.

If you have food scrap/yard waste collection service every week, you can add meat, fish, poultry, bones and dairy in addition to vegetables and fruit to the yard waste cart.

Won't the food scraps in my cart attract pests?

King County began food scrap and food soiled paper recycling with collection pilot programs which demonstrated, over five years, that curbside collection doesn't attract pests any more than garbage collection does. The agency Public Health-Seattle and King County, permits yard waste, food scrap and food soiled paper recycling programs, to make sure these collection programs are safe.

It is unlikely that your food scrap/yard waste cart will attract pests anymore than your garbage cart, if you manage your food scrap recycling properly. Make sure food odors don't attract pests by using a biodegradable or paper bag to contain the food scraps or layer your food scraps in between layers of yard waste. Always keep the lid closed. You can eliminate the odor problem by placing your food scraps in a paper bag or rolling in newspaper and storing in the freezer until collection day. Keep your cart clean by lining it with newspaper or cardboard and by rinsing it out regularly. Dump the rinse water on the lawn or in the garden. Do not rinse into a storm drain.

Another option for some areas is the use of biodegradable bags. An industry in its infancy, biodegradable bags are made from corn or soy based starch and offer great hope for an alternative to plastic film. Biodegradable bags breakdown quickly in a compost pile just like food scraps and food-soiled paper. However, there are some products being marketed as "biodegradable" that may not break down under normal composting conditions. Some bags simply breakdown into many small pieces of plastic,

and contaminate the final product, compost. Only approved bags are acceptable in the food scraps/yard waste cart. Check with your city or local, privately owned [Cedar Grove Composting](#) to learn about these bags and where you can buy them.

What is soiled paper?

Food-soiled paper is paper that is generated from the kitchen and has food contamination on it. Most paper from the kitchen can be put in the yard waste cart.

Can I recycle my used latté cup and paper take-out containers in my yard waste cart?

That depends! Many paper products have a plastic coating that does not break down sufficiently in the composting process. You can usually tell if it has a shiny coating – this is plastic and you should not put it in the yard waste cart.

Uncoated food-soiled paper does not have a shiny surface and can be put in the yard waste cart. Food-soiled paper that is acceptable includes napkins, paper towels, uncoated paper plates, coffee filters and even greasy pizza delivery boxes.

Manufacturers are working on developing 100% biodegradable disposable coffee cups but they have not been approved for disposal through yard waste collection service. Tully's compostable coffee cups should be thrown in the garbage not in the curbside yard waste collection cart.

When in doubt throw it out. Contamination increases the cost of recycling.

My city says that it is ok to put milk and ice cream cartons in the yard waste cart – aren't they coated?

It was in the spring of 2007 that we discovered plastic-coated paper products, such as milk cartons, do not break down sufficiently in the composting process. King County is now working with local cities to get the word out that these items are no longer accepted in the yard waste cart. You can put the rinsed out milk and ice cream cartons in your regular curbside recycling cart.

Can I put all my shredded paper in my yard waste cart?

No, shredded paper is not accepted in the yard waste/compost cart because it tends to contain pieces of plastic when people shred credit cards, or the plastic “windows” found on some envelopes. Shredded paper should be put in a plastic bag, tied and then placed in your garbage cart. You can also reduce the amount of paper you shred or check with your city or local businesses for “shred events” in your area.

What about biodegradable utensils?

There are new products everyday being marketed as biodegradable like cups, forks, plates and bowls. These products provide great promise for the future, but like biodegradable bags, many don't fully degrade in the composting process, they are a contaminant, which can lead to increased costs of recycling and lower product value.

Check with your city or local, privately owned [Cedar Grove Composting](#) to learn what kinds of biodegradable utensils are acceptable and where you can buy them.

With food scrap recycling, and traditional recycling, do you need such a large garbage cart, or do you need it collected every week?

If you recycle all your junk mail, cardboard, newspaper, tin cans, plastic and glass containers, and now all your food scraps and soiled paper, what's left in your garbage can? Maybe you don't need such a large garbage cart! Talk to your hauler about downsizing and potentially saving money.

If food scrap recycling is successful, it is possible that weekly garbage collection will eventually not be necessary. The Cities of Bellingham and Olympia have had garbage collection on a less than weekly basis for years. This collection schedule means that fewer garbage trucks could be on the road which has potential solid waste rate and environmental benefits. This is a scenario the King County Solid Waste Division is considering for future planning.