



Closing THE LOOP

With Organics Recycling

A practical guide for restaurant and food service operators





Introduction

This guide offers kitchen-tested ideas and solutions developed by the Green Table Network to help you design, implement and maintain an organics recycling program. The Green Table Network is a Vancouver not-for-profit organization that offers sustainability solutions to the restaurant and food service industry.

The ideas and recommendations in this guide were reviewed and tested by the Green Table Network. Tools and resources are also included to help customize your organics recycling program.

Food and food waste are often referred to as organics or green waste, and include fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, dairy items and eggs, as well as baked goods and prepared, processed and frozen foods. Full-service and quick-service restaurant organics may also include paper napkins and bags, uncoated paper cups and plates, coffee filters and tea bags, wooden utensils, chopsticks, stir sticks and toothpicks.

Content and creative in this guide courtesy of Metro Vancouver and adapted by Regional District of North Okanagan.

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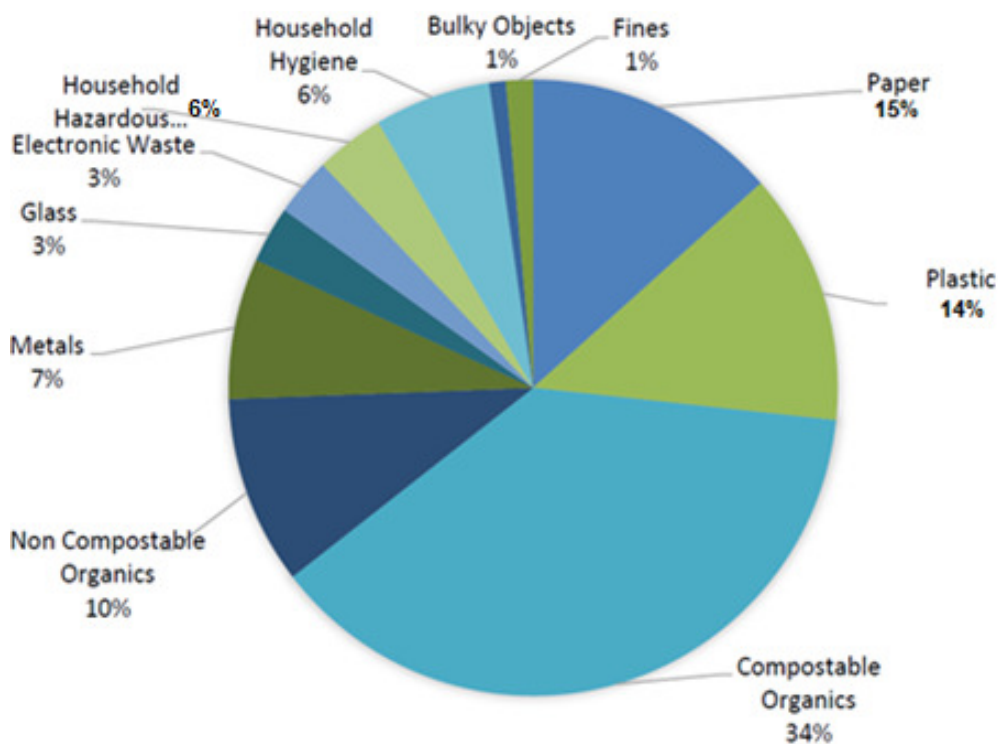


Waste by the Numbers

Compostable organics make up the largest portion of our garbage and represent the greatest opportunity to reach our waste reduction goals. Over 8,400 tonnes of food waste is sent to regional landfills by North Okanagan businesses and residents each year. That is an equivalent to over 91 kilograms of food waste per North Okanagan resident per year.

Landfilling food waste generates methane, a greenhouse gas over 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Canada's landfills currently generate approximately 20% of Canada's methane emissions. Reducing food waste can make a significant impact in addressing climate change.

Waste Composition in the North Okanagan



Benefit Your Business

Here are some smart, and strategic, reasons to add organics recycling to your operation's waste management program:

Protect the environment

After energy consumption, waste is the food service industry's largest environmental impact. Since typically 60% of food service waste is organic, redirection of this 'wet waste' from the landfill offers environmental and waste management benefits.

Cost savings

Substantially reduce the amount of garbage in your dumpster. You may be able to achieve cost savings over time by working with your hauler to adjust your waste removal contract to reflect reduced volumes of garbage.

Brand enhancement

Green actions build customer loyalty. Starting an organics program is a commitment and clear message for a greener future.

Employee retention and recruitment

More job seekers now choose a workplace that values environmental initiatives. Shared values lead to easier employee recruitment, higher retention rates and lower HR costs.

Every local food service operation can contribute to this system by simply doing something they are already expert at: optimizing the value of food.

Benefit Your Community

Being proactive on organics recycling contributes to the health and well-being of your community

Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions

Food disposed in a landfill generates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. If this waste is recycled, it can be processed into compost or bioenergy.

Returns nutrients to the soil

Food waste converted to compost can help rebuild and maintain regional gardens, parks and new agricultural projects. Applying compost to soils improves soil health and reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

Conserve our waterways

Compost boosts soil's ability to retain water and decreases runoff, which can pollute water systems by carrying soil, fertilizers and pesticides to nearby streams.



Waste Not

Food service operators do their best to manage inventory and limit overproduction. Food surplus or spoilage is often unavoidable. Composting this food is an excellent choice. However, donating excess food and ingredients to feed people in need is the first, best option.

There are a number of social service agencies involved in the rescue and redistribution of food to thousands of hungry people every day. Develop a relationship with a local charity or community food bank. Most will pick-up, or have drop-off hours, and will happily receive your usable leftover produce, pantry staples, packaged goods and, especially, prepared foods.

Each agency has their guidelines on acceptable food donations. Develop an in-house protocol for food donation and communicate it with your staff. Post the critical information as a reminder to your staff.

BC adopted a Good Samaritan ‘Food Donor Encouragement Act’ which protects donors from liability when they act in good faith to donate surplus perishable food, while ensuring recipients’ rights are protected.

The best rule of thumb for donation is safety first.

Here are some general guidelines for food donation:

Ingredients:

- Start with canned and dry packaged foods such as soups or sauce bases.
- Rice and pasta are always welcome as is fresh produce that is no longer restaurant quality or that will spoil before it can be used.
- Expired frozen items that have never been thawed can be safe to donate, but fresh meats, dairy products and other refrigerated products past their expiry dates may not be fully safe (though some programs may accept them).
- Check condition and expiry dates. Reject anything that could be unsafe to eat.
- Keep items in their original packaging and do not open.
- Mark thawed items so they will not be refrozen.
- Package food separately to prevent cross contamination.

Prepared dishes:

Often the most-desired items are leftover dishes that are prepared, kept hot and can be easily chilled or frozen for reheating. Be sure to manage temperature, handling and storage times for these items as you would for your own customers.

- Offer donated dishes in shallow, one-use recyclable aluminum pans or clear plastic food-grade bags.
- Package bulk donations, such as soups or stews, in containers that allow for temperature control.
- Label and date all containers so that contents can be readily identified.

Five Smart Steps

Like any addition to or change in operations, your new organics recycling program will require a degree of planning and preparation. These five steps are essential elements to any successful program.

- 1 Smart contracts** – Select a hauler or choose collection infrastructure that provides flexibility in the services you need and a pick-up schedule that fits.
- 2 Smart design** – Go with your work flow. Select the appropriately sized collection containers and place them strategically within your operations.
- 3 Smart staff** – Train your staff on the materials that go into the organics bin and the items to keep out. Assign responsibilities. Encourage and reward your ‘champions’.
- 4 Smart business** – Track your waste reduction performance and estimate your cost savings. Share the good news with your staff and customers.
- 5 Smart Customers** – If you are also diverting customer food and food soiled paper waste, make it easy for your patrons to participate. Consider prompts such as colour-coded bins and clear and concise signs.



It can be this simple.

Experienced food service operators will tell you that spending time to tailor a program to fit your business’s style and culture will make your program more successful in the long-term.

Customize Your Program...

Understanding Waste Sources

While they review their monthly waste management bills, most food service operators rarely take a close look at the contents of their dumpsters and recycling bins. In designing an effective organics recycling program, it's well worth getting a fresh snapshot of the amount and variety of materials that regularly travel through your operation.

1. Get to know your waste

This can be as simple as routinely viewing the amount and variety of materials ending up in your garbage. Identify problem areas of waste generation related to spoilage and menu prep. Look for opportunities for reducing the amount of waste diversion.

Remember the most effective way to manage waste is to not produce it in the first place.

A comprehensive waste audit will provide a profile of your waste and a baseline to measure your performance. Understanding the quantity and nature of the waste you are generating will also help you reflect on how your existing management policies and operating practices influence how waste is generated.

A proper waste audit can be a messy business, involving handling, sorting and weighing your garbage. Consider your options: conduct a waste sort as a team-building exercise for management and staff or leave it to one of the many qualified specialists. Check first with your waste hauler as they may offer waste audits to their customers.

2. Watch what you buy

In addition to evaluating the composition of your waste, consider your supply-side for reduction opportunities. Advise your suppliers that waste reduction is a priority. Review each of the products on your regular order sheets to identify whether it, and its packaging, is either compostable, or recyclable.

If you have questions about any item, consult your supplier or your hauler.

With this snapshot, you will not only know where each product should go, but also be able to review and substitute compostable options. Tell your suppliers that you want to reduce the non-recyclable materials you use and discuss options.



The next step is to determine what you'll need to efficiently collect it all for removal by your hauler.

The good news is you probably already have most of what you need.

Allow your team members to choose a metal or plastic tub, pan or bowl for their station – one that best suits their set-up and volume of work. For collecting organics in kitchen/prep areas, consider reusing plastic pails which are easy to clean and locate. A consistent colour or label scheme will make applicable pails easier to identify and use especially among different shift workers.

Midsize 50L stand-up bins are well suited to high- volume operations, such as banquet and catering prep areas and also work as an efficient organics collection receptacle on the cooking line to catch any misfires or mistakes.

Your hauler can provide information about the bins that will best suit your needs.

It's a good idea to set up organics collection bins beside garbage bins. This can help staff easily separate compostables from non-compostables, maximizing efficiency and minimizing chance of contamination. The rule of thumb here is "when in doubt, throw it out".

Compost quality is diminished when plastics (including those labelled biodegradable or similar) are added. It is important to check with your hauler or local composting facility to verify if any kinds of compostable plastics are accepted, again the rule of thumb here is "when in doubt, throw it out".

The Issue of Bags

To help keep organics collection bins clean and reduce the "ick" factor some operators like to use liners or bags. Check with your hauler on sourcing certified compostable liners or bags that will be acceptable at the processing facility.



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What's In? What's Out?

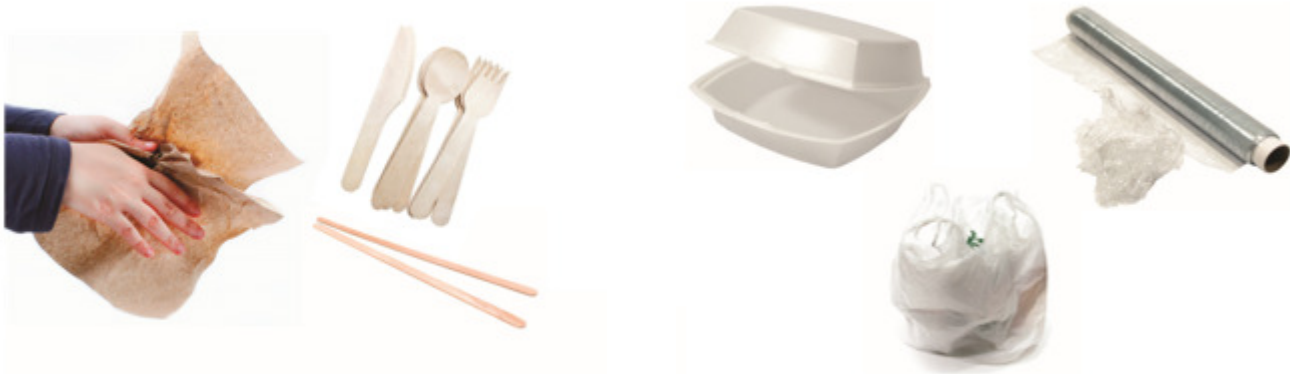
So what does compostable mean? In this guide it means materials that can be composted at commercial composting facilities in BC.

Also, it is very important to keep unwanted materials out of compost. Plastic, metal and glass do not belong in compost because they do not break down properly and they reduce the value of

compost. Sometimes contaminated food waste or compost must be landfilled because it cannot be used, creating more garbage and wasting the efforts of your team to reduce waste. Also, plastic can break down into smaller pieces during composting and end up polluting the environment if contaminated compost is applied to soils.

What's In 	What's Out 
All food, including bones, eggshells & sauces	Plastic & foil packaging
Coffee grounds, filters & tea bags (non-plastic)	Plastic wrap, trays, containers & lids
Wooden utensils, chopsticks & toothpicks	Plastic cutlery & straws
Paper napkins & paper towels	Paper/plastic lined cups and cartons
Paper takeout containers & bags	Styrofoam plates, containers & blocks
Plain uncoated paper plates, bowls & clamshells	Bags/containers labelled biodegradable or oxo-degradable
Wax coated paper & boxes	Metal and glass
Plastic is a major source of compost contamination. If in doubt, throw it out.	

Identify wax coated items from plastic coated paper items by dragging your finger nail across them. If it wax comes off, it is wax coated and it is okay to compost. If wax does not come off, assume it is plastic and therefore not compostable.



Check with your hauler to confirm whether your chosen product is accepted as compostable at the facility they haul to.

Staff Awareness

Being in the food service business, there's no need to remind you that, as with every other in-house program, your organics recycling initiative will only be truly 'sustainable' if your management and staff support it.

As part of a review of your current waste system, it's a very good idea to consult with your entire team to confirm the following procedures and policies:

- How is waste currently moved from the kitchen to loading bay or lane (per day/per week)?
- How is it done (with bags or a cart, etc.) and how often (per day/per week)?
- Whose job is it to manage the removal of waste and recyclable materials?
- Which factors (workload, absence, turnover) affect regular procedures?

For organics programs, experienced food service operators state that the best approach is to spread the tasks and responsibilities amongst all staff members.

That said, all staff will need ongoing and clear, consistent direction regarding:

- acceptable and unacceptable materials.
- key roles and assigned responsibilities.
- providing feedback on barriers and opportunities

Of course, you'll want to integrate orientation on organics recycling into your staff training program. Make waste reduction and recycling a standing item at your weekly meetings. This can be an excellent forum for discussing problems and to brainstorm solutions especially related to contamination.

Remember to talk about the program's success "X-number of tonnes saved from going into the garbage" always impresses and invite comments on problems with recommended solutions.

Dialogue like this will also encourage your team to talk up your 'growing green' organics program with customers because they'll also need to know how do their part.





“Everybody wants this to work, but at first, you need to repeat and repeat, give all staff pre-shift reminders of what goes in the organics bin, and more importantly, what doesn’t

We found that the best signs are the ones with pictures of the “No” items posted by the bin. That’s easiest to remember.

Around here, the front-of-house and back-of-house work together, but also hold each other accountable. That’s important, for a lot of reasons.”

Toby, Prep cook
Cactus Club
-Park Royal



“At the start of every shift, when a prep cook sets up their station, they head to the ware washing area to grab their cutting board and their green organics pail.

We’ve found that it’s best to put responsibility for organics recycling in each cook’s hands. It keeps the process in the forefront and helps focus the attention on minimizing contamination. When it’s fully integrated like that, it just works.”

Aryn Ferguson
Facilities Manager
UBC Food Services

Contamination and Odours

Contamination is a serious problem for all organics haulers and recyclers, and a frequent source of frustration for food service operators. Glass is the most dangerous contaminant and plastic the most common.

Contamination can lead to three undesirable outcomes:

- your hauler can refuse to pick up your organics bins.
- entire truckloads of organics are refused at the composting facility, and sent to landfill instead.
- haulers and organics facilities are forced to add more screening processes, adding costs to your service.

Each of these scenarios will add costs and human resources to your operations. The solutions are simple if not always easy. Food service operations can reduce contamination with regular orientation for all staff, clear messaging to customers, and working 'upstream' to eliminate or replace products that cause contamination.

Here are some strategies to consider:

- offer regular reminders to all staff about organics practices and policies. Ensure signs and prompts are current and accurate. A good practice is to post images of the top 5 potential contaminants at your operation.
- create an atmosphere where staff can help each other to make the system work. Encourage friendly competition (between shifts or stores) to keep your program fresh and interesting.

Odours from organic bins are not, or shouldn't be, any more noticeable than those from a regular garbage bin. There are, however, some common practices you should apply to your program:

1. Keep organics bins clean – talk to your hauler about this. They may exchange dirty bins for clean ones or wash them onsite. Some may expect your staff to rinse and clean them.

- use small kitchen bins that can run through the dishwasher regularly.
- clean and rinse customer-area bins regularly.
- refresh bins with organic odour control such as a dash of vinegar or sprinkle of baking soda.
- line bin bottoms with compostable cardboard, egg cartons, newspaper, paper towels or napkins to soak up liquids.

2. Practice smart storage – if any odour issues arise, they're usually due to extended storage or storage conditions.

- use leak-proof containers with closed lids.
- keep outdoor bins out of the direct sun on warm days.
- schedule routine clearing of past-date freezer and walk-in items with organics pick-up schedule.



Preventing Pests

The majority of food service operators with established organics programs report no increase in the amount of pests. However, if you have particular concerns, here are some simple preventative actions you can take:

Flies

- keep bins, particularly those containing meat and protein scraps, closed as much as possible.
- herb spray, such as pennyroyal, eucalyptus, mint or bayleaf, will repel flies as will a splash of vinegar.
- make layers: cover fruit/vegetable scraps with shredded paper, napkins or other paper.

Rodents and other pests

- lock your bins and store outdoors as much as possible
- store bins away from fences, trees, picnic tables, as animals might use them to access the bins.



Health & Safety

Organics collection bins can get very heavy, very quickly. Topped up with a typical waste mix, a 120L bin can weigh up to 150 kg, double that for a 240L bin.

- To avoid strains or injuries caused by moving large bins, have staff dump small kitchen bins into larger bins located in the loading bay or storage area where only your hauler has to move them.

Staff may be tempted to remove obvious contaminants from bins.

- Ensure they use tongs and wear protective gloves to avoid risk of injury from broken glass or other sharps.

Customers Awareness

If you design a front-of-house system that clearly and easily shows your customers what to do, evidence suggests most will take the time to sort their waste.

At the point-of-sale, staff have the best opportunity to highlight and ‘coach’ customers on the in-house system and field any related questions. Prepare and distribute a consistent, clear (and friendly) customer message for all staff to deliver. Ensure the message is updated to reflect any product changes.

Label the sorting station. This isn’t the place for generic messages. Use signs with clear, simple messages of the actual items and products served or offered at your operation. Colour coding and ‘right sizing’ opening for the materials will also help customers choose the correct bin.

Switching to condiments in bulk rather than individual-sized packets will also help to remove waste.

Again, the default policy should be “when in doubt, throw it out”. Every hauler will tell you it’s better to add garbage than to risk contaminating the organics.

The most-effective systems allow the customer to ‘deconstruct’ their plate or tray in a convenient location with clear visual prompts that support their effort.



*Currently businesses may choose to have Font-of-House organics diversion but it is not currently a requirement of RDNO Commercial Food Waste Disposal regulation.

Hauler Considerations

Though it's not necessarily standard procedure with other waste or recycling streams, collaborating with your hauler is essential to the success your organics program.

Effective and timely dialogue will help manage contamination issues, keep costs low and maximize waste diversion.

Some key factors to discuss include:

- service start-up – unlike standard dumpster service, a new organics program often needs a 'settling-in' period to determine the optimum number of bins and pick-ups, and to deal with common implementation issues like contamination. Confirm your hauler's availability during this critical period.
- flexibility of service – again, unlike dumpster service, organics recycling typically requires adjustment to the number of bins in-use and frequency of pick-ups. If your operation has seasonal variations or promotional periods that boost customer flow and waste output, you'll likely need to adjust your organics service. Ensure your hauler can accommodate these changes without cost penalties.
- clean and green – whether liners are specified or not, organics bins need to be cleaned regularly to help control odours. Ask whether the hauler has a bin cleaning and replacement program or policy.
- supplementary services - including signage, waste reduction assessments and audits as well as regular reports on your diversion amounts.
- service consolidation and cost offsets – whenever possible, consolidate all your waste/recycling programs with one hauling service to help keep administration time and costs low.



“Handling the multiple bins made for some extra work at first, but it also made our recycling program tidier.

Because of the clear pictures and large signs, staff received very few customer questions regarding the sorting station. Given the opportunity, our customers simply made it work.”

Lisa
Store Manager
Terra Breads
Vancouver

Tips & Resources

Inventory control:

- Search online for: “BC Food Waste Prevention Toolkits”
- Practice First In, First Out (FIFO) to store food to avoid spoilage and use older products first.
- Store food with a short shelf-life appropriately and visibly to ensure it gets used up.
- Take regular walk-throughs and inventories to identify food before it spoils.

Reduce odors and pests:

- Keep bins clean and when appropriate use bin liners (check with your hauling company for policies and options).
- Freshen bins up with vinegar and baking soda.
- Cover discarded food scraps as much as possible, especially ones with strong odors such food high in protein.
- Keep outdoor bins closed and prevent access points for wildlife.

Donating Surplus Safe and Healthy Food:

- Food Donation Guidelines: search BCCDC Food Donation Guidelines.
- Find a Food Bank at www.foodbanksbc.com.

Signage Resources:

- Check with your hauling company.
- Search: “Metro Vancouver Recycling Signage” for a wide variety of signs, icons and template courtesy of Metro Vancouver.

For information on companies that collect food waste or resources for onsite composting technologies contact RDNO Solid Waste Operations Office at 250-550-3785 or solidwaste@rdno.ca.