



Purchasing Guidelines for Compostable Food-Related Products

Updated 8/13/15

We have developed these guidelines to help manufacturers, distributors, and purchasers of all sizes make informed decisions regarding the manufacturing, distribution and purchasing of compostable food-related products.

What They Are

These products come in the shape of liner bags, hot and cold beverage cups, bowls, plates, food-service trays, to-go clamshells, straws and utensils. They are made from renewable resources such as corn, sugar cane, grasses, palm leaves, and wood instead of petroleum-derived plastic polymers. When processed in a **commercial composting facility** such as Green Mountain Compost, truly compostable items will always:

- Break down completely and in their entirety into organic matter that can be digested as food by microorganisms in the composting process.
- Break down within 180 days.
- The microorganisms will consume the material at the same rate as they would natural materials such as food scraps, food-soiled paper, leaves and other yard debris.

Compostable products that are sent to a landfill (thrown in the trash) will NOT degrade to any acceptable degree. Various life cycle analyses of compostable plastics vs. conventional plastics have reached conflicting conclusions regarding the sustainability of one over the other. It is our position that when these items end up in landfills, the purchaser is spending extra money for dubious benefit, and end users are misled into believing that disposing of these products in a landfill is environmentally beneficial. *If you are not providing end-user education and collection for composting of these items along with your food scraps, we recommend that you do not purchase them.*

Purchasing Hierarchy

Best Option: Purchase reusable items.

The best option from a waste-reduction standpoint continues to be durable, washable, reusable food-service items whenever possible. They are manufactured once and used multiple times, requiring no extra energy and infrastructure for composting or landfilling.

Option 2: Purchase Items that can be composted in a backyard compost pile.

The next best option is to choose products that are made entirely from uncoated paper or other plant fiber, which will be composted in a backyard system. To date, most “certified compostable” products require commercial composting conditions in order to be composted in a reasonable time frame.

Option 3: Purchase items that can be composted at Green Mountain Compost.

All non-food products sent to Green Mountain Compost for composting must be certified as compostable (see specifications below). Hand-in-hand with purchasing compostable food-service items comes the responsibility by the purchaser to provide a way for those items to be collected and composted. If they are thrown in with landfill-

bound trash, they (and the money and time you spent sourcing certified products) will remain entombed in the landfill. Once there, these product will take decades to decompose, emitting methane gas that is 20 times more damaging to the planet than carbon dioxide in the process.

If you are committed to ensuring that items you purchase will be collected and sent without contamination (i.e., plastic and other non-compostables) to Green Mountain Compost, read on for the acceptability requirements.

Option 4: Purchase recyclable items.

The next best option is to use items that are recyclable. Items **must** be rinsed or wiped clean of food when discarded in a recycling bin, which is often not an option in public spaces and events. (Note that utensils are NOT recyclable, no matter what they're made from). Recycling ensures that resources used to manufacture products can be captured and reinvested in new materials. Again, providing recyclable materials provides zero benefit unless proper rinsing, separation, collection, and delivery to a recycling facility are also provided.

Minimum Product Requirements for Commercial Composting

Any product that is manufactured, distributed, or purchased for use in Chittenden County by a business or facility that sends its food scraps to Green Mountain Compost **must** meet one of these criteria:

- The individual product has been certified as compostable by the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) and its item number is found in their [Certified Compostable Products index](#). This logo should appear on the product and/or its packaging:



- OR the item manufacturer or vendor can provide documentation that it has been third-party tested and demonstrated to have met ASTM D6400 or D6868 standards for compostability.
- OR the product website or packaging indicates that this individual product is composed of 100% uncoated/untreated wood, bamboo, or palm leaves.

PLEASE NOTE: Only individual products or items—NOT brands--can be certified. Some brands sell certified compostable as well as non-compostable items.

Purchasing Recommendations

1. **Purchase only clearly labeled products:** We highly encourage that any certified compostable product sold or used in Chittenden County be clearly labeled and visibly distinctive from conventional (petroleum or natural gas derived) plastic and plastic-coated items. This may become a mandate in the future, so we recommend putting it into practice now. The cup shown here is one example of labeling we would find acceptable.



Use vendors that support responsible purchasing and disposal practices: Go to

[GreenMountainCompost.com/foodware](https://www.greenmountaincompost.com/foodware) for a list of brands we recommend. We endorse these brands because:

- The brand supports easy purchasing by making or selling ONLY certified compostable products, OR
 - If the brand also makes or sells non-compostable products, these are clearly and easily distinguished on their website from compostable products.
2. **Do not purchase** products labeled or described only as “biodegradable,” “oxodegradable,” “95% compostable” or any other version of “degradable.” These products are not compostable and violate the minimum acceptance requirements at Green Mountain Compost. Regardless of claims, only products that meet the certification requirements stated above are acceptable at Green Mountain Compost.

Storage, Disposal and Legal Considerations

Storage and use considerations: Compostable plastic bags, cups and bowls should not be stored or displayed in high-humidity and/or high-heat environments (e.g. kitchens or direct sunlight), since these conditions may cause them to degrade or “melt.”

Disposal Guidelines:

- **The end user** of any compostable product must know that the item in his hand is compostable. This information is typically conveyed verbally or through well-placed signage;
- **The end user** must know how and where to put it so that it will be properly managed for composting.
- **The individual or business** implementing this product must make that method of disposal conveniently available to the end user.

Legal considerations: The [U.S. Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) “Green Guides”](#) help marketers avoid making unfair or deceptive environmental marketing claims, including claims about the compostability of their products. These guides apply to marketing to individuals as well as to business-to-business transactions, and to environmental claims in labeling, advertising, promotional materials, and all other forms of marketing in any medium, whether asserted directly or by implication, through words, symbols, logos, depictions, product brand names, or any other means.

The FTC has pursued enforcement action, including fines, against companies operating or selling in Vermont that violate these guides. CSWD has and will continue to refer products it believes to be in violation of the Green Guides to the VT Attorney General and the FTC for investigation.

For more information

If you are a business in Chittenden County and have questions regarding this policy, contact CSWD Business Outreach Coordinator Michele Morris at 802-872-8100 x237 or mmorris@cswd.net.

If you have questions regarding Green Mountain Compost, contact General Manager Dan Goossen at dan@greenmountaincompost.com or 802-660-4949.

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