A Guide to Purchasing Sustainable Foodware

CSWD's Tips & Resources

CSWD
Chittenden Solid Waste District

Making good choices when purchasing foodware products can be quite complicated. There are a lot of different foodware products out there: molded fiber, plastic, compostable "look-alike" plastic, bamboo, paper, and more. There are also some changing rules regarding what can and can't be recycled or composted. One of those recent rule changes:

As of January 1, 2022, CSWD no longer accepts compostable foodware and packaging (cups, utensils, plates, straws, etc.) in our compost stream.

We understand that this change has particularly impacted businesses that chose compostable products to improve sustainability and reduce waste. We hope this guide offers valuable information and guidance for selecting sustainable foodware options.

Preferred

- Plastics made of recycled material (rPET)
- Recyclable plastic foodware
  - Plastics #1, #2, or #5
- Aluminum containers

Can be recycled if clean and free of food residue

How clean do recyclables have to be?

- Empty out contents
- Rinse or wipe out most food residue

Avoid

- Compostable foodware
- Non-recyclables (#6 and #7)
- Cardboard foodware
- Black plastic

If you opt to use these items, please direct customers to put them in the trash.

Types of Foodware

PROS, CONS, AND PROPER DISPOSAL

PET Foodware

PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic is a strong, lightweight, and clear plastic that can be identified by 1

PRICE RANKING: $ $

Pros:
- Recyclable (if empty & clean)

Cons:
- Petroleum-based
- Must be thrown in trash if dirty

rPET Foodware

The "r" in front of PET means that the container is produced using recycled PET post-consumer plastic containers/bottles.

PRICE RANKING: $ $ $

Pros:
- Recyclable (if empty & clean)
- Lower carbon footprint since it's made from recycled material (even if thrown away in trash)

Cons:
- Petroleum-based
- Must be thrown in trash if dirty

Aluminum Container

Aluminum can be infinitely recycled , making this a very sustainable packaging option.

PRICE RANKING: $ $ $ $

Pros:
- Recyclable (if empty & clean)
- Infinitely recyclable

Cons:
- Must be thrown in trash if dirty

PLA Foodware

PLA (polylactic acid) is a plant-based plastic look-alike typically made from the sugar found in corn, cassava, or sugarcane. This material is marked as "compostable", however our compost facility does not accept this material.

PRICE RANKING: $ $ $

Pros:
- Plant-based

Cons:
- Not compostable or recyclable in VT
- Must be thrown in trash
- Confusing disposal

Fiber Foodware

Fiber packaging can be made from different materials including recycled content (such as newspaper and cardboard) or natural fibers such as wood pulp, bamboo, bagasse, and wheat straw.

PRICE RANKING: $ $ $

Pros:
- Derived from recycled or natural materials

Cons:
- Not compostable or recyclable in VT
- Must be thrown in trash
- Confusing disposal for customers

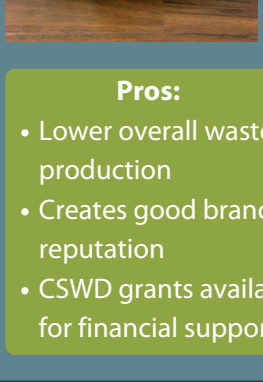
Paper Foodware

Poly-coated paper foodware is made of paper with a plastic lining in order to keep food contents from leaking or seaping into the paper container.

PRICE RANKING: $

Pros:
- Derived from recycled or natural materials

Cons:
- Not compostable or recyclable in VT (has plastic or chemical coating)
- Must be thrown in trash
- Confusing disposal for customers



Reusable Foodware

Reusable take-out containers are a great way to reduce waste. These can also be great for restaurants looking to implement a rewards program for loyal, conscious consumers.

PRICE RANKING: $ $ $ $

Pros:
- Lower overall waste production
- Creates good brand reputation
- CSWD grants available for financial support

Cons:
- High initial cost
- Must be used 10-20 times to outweigh environmental impact of single-use container

Types of Utensils

PROS, CONS, AND PROPER DISPOSAL

Napkins & Toothpicks

Pros:
- Compostable
- Most affordable option

Cons:
- Limited use & functionality compared to standard utensils

Chopsticks

Pros:
- Compostable
- Low cost

Cons:
- Limited use & functionality compared to standard utensils

Reusable Utensils

Pros:
- Lower overall waste production
- Creates good brand reuptation
- Local grants available for financial support

Cons:
- High initial cost
- Must be used 10-20 times to outweigh environmental impact of single-use container

Plastic Utensils

Pros:
- Low cost

Cons:
- Must be thrown in trash
- Petroleum-based

PLA "Compostable" Utensils

Pros:
- Plant-based

Cons:
- Not compostable in VT
- Must be thrown in trash
- Confusing disposal for customers

Wooden & Bamboo Utensils

Pros:
- Plant-based

Cons:
- Not compostable in VT
- Must be thrown in trash
- Often contain synthetic bindings and chemicals for structure and water-resistance
- Confusing disposal

Thank you from CSWD
Chittenden Solid Waste District