

good signage that instructs customers to separate their trash, there will be high levels of contamination. Composting is more likely to succeed in restaurants that prepare their own food than in fast food operations. The latter tend to involve relatively little on-site food preparation.

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One of the major challenges is hauling costs. While many local farmers would welcome additional compost material, they do not have time to collect it from restaurants. A restaurant interested in composting needs to determine if hauling costs to a compost site are less than waste disposal fees. The volume of food scraps generated can be estimated by assuming that each meal generates about 1.5 pounds of compost material. One study estimated that about half this material (0.75 pounds) was pre-consumer and 0.75 pounds were post-consumer.



Where Can We Learn More About Composting?

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See also these websites:

Composting in restaurants and schools: A Municipal Tool Kit:

<http://www.cetonline.org/Publications/res-schools-online.pdf>

Food Waste Management Cost Calculator:

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserva/materials/organics/food/tools/foodcost.pdf>

Green restaurant Association:

<http://www.dinegreen.com/customers/education.asp>

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RESTAURANT COMPOSTING:



AN OVERVIEW

Why Compost?

The price of solid waste disposal in Hancock County is increasing. At the same time, there is greater demand for high quality compost from both farmers and landscapers. By initiating a compost program, restaurants not only are saving money but are engaging in environmentally sound practices. According to the US EPA, 60-80 percent of a typical sit-down style restaurant's waste is food. This brochure addresses some of the basic questions about restaurant composting that will help you determine if it will work for you.

Will Composting Make Extra Work for Restaurant Employees?

It will involve some staff training. It is important to have individual composting receptacles (many restaurants use 5-6 gallon containers) located in easy access to the food preparation areas and in places where plates are scraped clear of uneaten food. These receptacles should be in easy reach of the larger container that will be removed from the premises by the hauler. Ideally, it should be adjacent to the trash container so the employees responsible for emptying the receptacles won't have to carry food scraps any further than trash. This reduces the temptation to put food scraps in the trash container.

Separation of food scraps from other material is important. Items such as plastic forks and Styrofoam cups can contaminate a load. It is important to instruct staff on what can be composted and what cannot. If there is any doubt that adequate separation can be achieved, it is better to focus on those food scraps that can be separated easily than risk delivery of a contaminated load. For example, it is easy to separate vegetable peelings and other scraps from food preparation. During the start-up phase, it is important to monitor what is being placed to the compost containers.

What about odors and pests?

If a composting program is done correctly, odors and pests should not be an issue.

Remember that no new waste is being generated (the same material was previously going in the trash). In fact, since the food waste is in separate containers that receive periodic cleaning, many restaurant managers have noticed an improvement in the trash area. Food scraps will produce an odor over time, whether mixed in with trash or collected separately.

The key is to remove it from the site before the odor builds up. Consistent and frequent pickups are essential, and the hauler may need to plan for additional pickups in the warmer months. Placing wood chips in the bottom of the tote or dumpster can help scrape out the majority of the food when the container is emptied. Some restaurants line the bottom of a tote with waxed cardboard, a common restaurant waste that is not recyclable but is compostable. Paper napkins (if not dyed) can also be composted.



What Sort of Food Scrap Storage Container Should be Used?

This depends on the configuration of the restaurant and the needs of the hauler. A compactor can be cost-effective for collecting large volumes of material, but has high up-front costs. Also, compactors are too big to fit in many locations and, unless swapped when emptied, a business

can't dispose of any material until it is returned.

A dumpster can hold a large volume of material and can be emptied from the truck, but can be difficult to clean and doesn't work in spaces that can't be easily accessed by truck.

Dumpsters come in a variety of sizes so can be flexible in adjusting for collection capacity. Also, one truck can easily collect from businesses that have a wide variety of capacity needs.



Totes are very mobile and versatile, but the 96-gallon size can be too heavy when full of food waste, so a 64-gallon size is recommended. They may be easier to keep clean, and changing collection capacity is simple.

When Does Restaurant Composting Work and When Doesn't It Work?

It works best in restaurants that offer sit down meals where the management has a strong commitment to composting. It is not recommended for operations where customers bus their own tables.