

Zero Waste Events

Before the Event

Because our compost is used by farms and landscapers, the quality of the materials that we send to composting facilities is very important. **Event hosts (i.e. YOU!) are responsible for ensuring that contamination of event compost bags does not occur.** Composting is easy, but clear communication to event participants about what can and cannot be composted is critical.

Catering

1. Determine all food and serving products you will need, such as food, drinks, cups, plates, bowls, utensils, tablecloths, and centerpieces. Make sure all are recyclable, compostable, or reusable. It's best if all plastic looking products are compostable (especially beer & wine cups) to avoid confusion.
2. Tell the caterer that you do not want any single-serve packets—they are usually not recyclable or compostable (i.e. sugar, ketchup, butter in foil)—or non-compostable materials (i.e. plastic coffee stirrers, tea in foil bags, small creamers, ice cream wrappers, sandwiches wrapped in plastic or in plastic lunch bags, etc.) that can contaminate the compost & recycling.
3. Request "[Biodegradable Products Institute](#) (BPI) certified" compostable materials from your caterer or order some from OfficeMax or Eco-Products (see next page).

Bins, Signs & Volunteers

1. Borrow compost and recycling bins (foldable Clearstreams) from Harvard Recycling* (rob_gogan@harvard.edu) if your venue does not supply them. We recommend having a small number of stations (four stations per 200 people) and only a small trash bin for any trash that shows up (similar in size to your desk-side bin).
2. Borrow compostable bags from Harvard Recycling* or purchase them yourself (see page 3).
3. [Download](#) tailored recycling/compost signs and table tents from OFS. See images on next page for proper sign placement (on bins, near plates/utensils, at bar, table tents, & easels).
4. Make sure compost will be picked up the next day. Schedule with Harvard Recycling if your building does not compost already.
5. Be sure to recruit volunteers that can monitor bins and bring compost and recycling to the appropriate area at the end of the event.

At the Event: Best Practices

1. Put out signage. Taping actual objects to the bins is VERY helpful.
2. Check for any non-compostable materials brought by the caterer, as they often make mistakes.
3. Most importantly, staff the waste stations to ensure that compost is not contaminated.
4. Train custodians, servers, bartenders, and volunteers ([download](#) an instructional guide for staff).
5. Make a brief announcement about event composting (remind attendees that contamination is harmful to those who use our compost and remind them what can be composted).

*Note that Harvard Recycling does not service the Longwood campus or all Harvard buildings. Contact OFS if they do not and you need help.

Zero Waste Events

Signage

Download signs from green.harvard.edu/reducing-waste/downloads



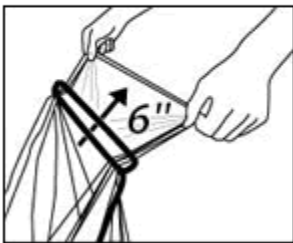
Bin set-up



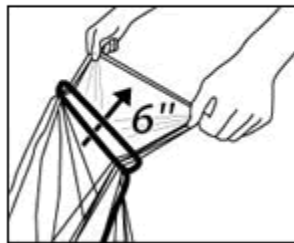
Compost bin

How to put bags on ClearStreams:

Recycling...The Clear Choice® BAG LOCK, As Easy As 1 - 2 - 3



1. Through the Loop 6"

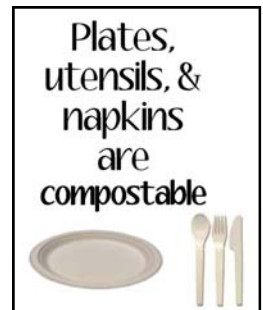


2. Over the Loop 3"



3. Pull sides down & in!

More detailed info: www.resourceful-1.com/p/clearstream-setup.htm



Reducing Food Waste

More important than any composting or recycling is reducing food waste. It's best to have a recipient in mind beforehand. The Boston Food Bank loves getting servable meals every evening! Of course, only wrapped foods that weren't set out for guests can be donated.

Signs for near bar & buffet

Zero Waste Events

Compostable Product Sources

**** Make sure that the compostable items are [Biodegradable Products Institute](#) certified.**

- **Crimson Catering:** Compostable products are available from Crimson Catering for an additional 50 cents per person.
- **Other Caterers:** Other local caterers offer compostable products, including Jules Catering, Whole Foods, Basil Tree, Redbones, etc.
- **OfficeMax:** OfficeMax sells compostable products: utensils are 6 cents each, plates, bowls, & cups are 8-15 cents each. Shipping is free.
- **Eco-Products:** Eco-Products sells compostable products: utensils are 5 cents each, plates, bowls, & cups are 6-15 cents each. Shipping is extra (www.ecoproducts.com).
- **Office for Sustainability:** We often keep extra stocks of compostable materials that we can sell to you at cost (sustainability@harvard.edu).

Compostable Bag Sources

- **Bags for Clearstreams:** Contact ClearStream or Rob Gogan for bags.
- **Other sized bags:**
 - Durkin Company, Eddie Sullivan (es0231@comcast.net)
 - BioBag, Tom Goldy (tom@biobagusa.com)
 - Xpedx, Bill Fay (William.Fay@ipaper.com)

****Note that the Stout brand bags sold by OfficeMax are **NOT** Biodegradable Product Institute certified and should not be used for compost.

Composting FAQs

What CAN be composted?

- ALL food waste (including grains, breads, meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables, tea bags, and coffee grinds)
- napkins & paper towels
- compostable plates, bowls, cups, and utensils
- wooden coffee stirrers
- tea bags (staples are ok) and coffee grinds
- the green compostable bags that line the compost bins

What CANNOT be composted?

- plastics
- metal
- coffee lids
- sugar packets (these are lined with plastic coating)
- plastic ketchup or similar dressing and sauce packets
- styrofoam cups
- plastic bags
- foil or plastic bags that individually wrapped tea bags come in

If you're not sure— trash it!

The Composting Process

Where does the compost go?

Compost goes to one of two composting facilities on the North Shore—unlike a backyard compost, they are able to break down meat and compostable plastics.

What makes the containers compostable?

These products (including plates, cups, & utensils) are derived from plants and will biodegrade in the proper environment.

- Plates and bowls are usually made from bagasse, a sugarcane waste product
- Cups are usually made from corn plastic
- Utensils are usually made from potato starch

How long does it take the bio-plastics to break down?

Under the naturally high temperature environment of the commercial composting facility we use, it takes a maximum of nine months to become compost. It can be much quicker under ideal conditions.

What is bagasse? (Used in the plates and bowls)

Bagasse is the remnants leftover from sugar processing and is used to make paper. This process requires no bleaching, is more biodegradable, easier to recycle, and overall has less impact on the environment.

What is corn-based PLA (Used in the cups)

PLA (polylactic acid) is a corn-based plastic which looks and acts like petroleum based polymers, but is made from renewable resources, breaks down into natural components, and uses 65% less energy than plastic to produce. More info: www.natureworkspla.com.

Note—these cups look EXACTLY like other plastic cups that are not biodegradable, so it is important to check the bottom of the cup or know what cups were purchased for the event to make sure it says “PLA” or “compostable” before composting them.

PLA, a great product, is not a panacea to our waste problems. Read more about it here: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/10022381.html>

Successful Events

Waste Stations



Volunteers at stations

Other Signage



Table tent



Covered-up trash bin



Labels near cups