

# Zero Waste in Action

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## Curbside Composting: Seattle, Washington, USA

### Summary

Food scrap and yard waste collection service is required at all residential properties, including multi-family units. MFU participation is encouraged through volunteer property ambassadors who help educate residents and monitor the bins.

### Population

635,000

### Year enacted

2009

### Who's affected

Households, Apartments

### How Curbside Composting Began

Seattle began food waste composting in 2005 by allowing residents to put fruit and vegetable scraps in their yard waste carts.

In 2009, the city expanded to accept all food scraps, including meat and dairy products and food-soiled paper, in the curbside composting bin from households. Residents are required to have curbside composting service. The amount of organics collected rose 32% in the first year.

By 2012, all residential properties, including MFUs, were required to have composting service. Businesses are eligible to sign up for curbside compost collection and pay 32% less than the price of garbage, but are not required to have service.

### Single-Family Composting Service

All residential properties with up to four units have been required to have a food and yard waste cart for compost collection since 2009.



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Compost and trash are collected weekly while recycling is collected every other week. The city contracts with two haulers to provide services throughout the city: CleanScapes, Inc. and Waste Management of Washington, Inc.

Recycling service is provided for free alongside trash collection, but residents are charged separately for their food and yard waste cart. There are three levels of organics collection:

- 13-gallon can for \$4.95 per month
- 32-gallon can for \$7.45 per month
- 96-gallon can for \$9.50 per month

Residents are charged for additional bundles of yard waste. Yard waste is banned from the landfill.

Residents that actively compost food and yard scraps in their backyard can be exempted from having to pay for curbside compost collection. These residents must agree to comply with public and environmental health guidelines and allow Seattle Public Utility representatives to evaluate their composting methods.

## Multi-Family Property Composting

All multi-family properties with five or more units must provide residents with a food and yard cart. The cart is lined with a compostable bag and the compost hauler provides a new bag to reline the bin every time it is emptied.

MFUs receive weekly compost collection and can choose from various cart sizes:

- 32 gallon cart, recommended for 5-20 units, for \$28 per month
- 64-gallon cart, recommended for 20-40 units, for \$54 per month
- 96-gallon cart, recommended for 20-100 units, for \$63 per month

In 2012 the city signed up more than 4,700 multi-family properties for food waste collection and delivered 7,500 free kitchen compost containers to multi-family properties.

The Friends of Recycling and Composting (FORC) program encourages MFUs to participate in the composting program by training an ambassador at the property to help educate residents and monitor the bins. The ambassador can be a property manager, staff, or resident. After a designated FORC attends a training, all residents of the property receive free kitchen compost pails for collecting food scraps. The MFU is also eligible for a \$100 discount on their utility bill.

## Compostable Materials and Education

The city accepts for composting all meat and dairy products, bones and seafood shells, uncoated soiled food paper, compostable bags, approved compostable tableware (brown toned trays from certain food retailers), yard waste, shredded paper.

Many bioplastic containers and tableware are not accepted.



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Seattle's composting facility, Cedar Grove, has been a national leader in testing bioplastics and other products and packaging to see which materials live up to their claims and actually break down in their facility. Cedar Grove does not allow PLA bioplastics at its facilities unless the product has the Cedar Grove stamp of approval.

The city provides some indoor composting containers to residents as well as extensive education and resources on how and why to compost. Its recycling and composting guidelines are available in 15 languages.

In both 2011 and 2012, more than 1,000 kitchen compost containers and 2,000 reusable bags were distributed at community events. Residents purchased more than 1,000 discounted kitchen compost containers during Compost Days, a partnership with Cedar Grove Composting.

## **Diversion Rates and Goals**

Seattle adopted a Zero Waste Resolution in 2007 and in 2013 set the goals of recycling 60% by 2015 and 70% by 2022, as well as reducing the total amount of trash disposed by at least 1.0% each year.

Seattle recycled 55.7% of its waste in 2012 and has reduced its waste by 28%, or 123,441 annual tons, since 2007.

Single-family residents are recycling and composting more than 71% of their discards, yet food waste is still 30% of the trash from households after recycling and composting, showing there is still room to grow in food waste composting.

## **Downloads**

[Seattle Composting and Recycling Guidelines, 2013](#)

[Seattle, WA, Residents Add Food Waste Service](#)

## **More information**

[Seattle Public Utilities Food & Waste Composting](#)

[Seattle's Solid Waste Plan 2011 Revision](#)

[Solid Waste Reports](#)

[Cedar Grove Commercially Accepted Compostable Materials](#)

[Seattle Solid Waste Contracts](#)



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