

EATS: Compost Checklist Guide

Start a Successful Compost* Program: For Quick Service, Fast Casual and Full Service Restaurants

*You may also hear the terms food scraps or organics to describe a program where you are separating food, paper, and other compostable products from your recyclable and landfill-bound waste streams.

1) Engage Owners, Managers, and Staff

- Get buy-in from **owners**.
- Get buy-in from **managers**.
- Get input from **staff**, especially those who are **currently handling waste and recycling**.
- Find out who is **passionate** about composting and wants to **take the lead**.

2) Ask Questions (Do Research)

- Call your garbage and recycling service company.** Ask the following questions:
 1. What **size containers/bins** do you offer for indoor/outdoor food scrap collection?
 2. **How frequently** will the containers be picked up?
 3. Will all containers (Landfill, Recycling, Compost) fit in the **current dumpster area**?
 4. What is the **cost of the service**? Will this cost be offset by an equivalent decrease in garbage pickup frequency/cost?
 5. When will a representative be available for a **walk-through** so I can assess how to set up a compost program for my business?
 - Additional Questions (if time allows)
 1. What types of **food items are acceptable**? Cooked food? Meat? Bones and shells?
 2. What types of **non-food items are acceptable**? Napkins? Paper service ware? BPI certified compostable products?
 3. What **compost related services** do you offer (indoor bins, signage, staff training, waste audits)?
 4. Is using a specific type of **bin liner** (compostable bags) required?
 5. Are there **other customers in the area** with a compost program?
- Look up *We Compost* partners** (illinoiscomposts.org/we-compost/restaurants) and see who else is composting. **Call them up and learn** from what they are doing.



The rooftop garden at Uncommon Ground, a restaurant that participates in a commercial compost program, grows greens for their menu selections.

3) Tee It Up (Prepare for Launch)

- Do a walk-through with your service provider and key staff members.
 - Discuss common food scrap discards. Share with the compost collection company what your **typical food scraps** are. Meat scraps? Bones? Shells? Fruit peels?
 - Discuss common non-food compostables. Share what you **typically throw away that is not food**. These often include: napkins, paper towels, waxed paper, and paper plates/cups.
 - Identify key locations of food scrap generation (such prep and dish washing stations). Make sure there is room to place compost, recycling, and trash containers and signage in **each of these locations**.
 - Determine how the food scraps will be discarded in the bin. **Which employees** will do this?
- Design, print and post signs.
- Purchase floor or counter additional bins (if needed).
- Set up signs and containers together.
- Train (and retrain) your staff.
 - Hold a **special training** session for employees on compost separation.
 - Designate a **team leader** for each work area to guide and remind staff of the proper way to sort.
 - Have “pop quizzes” at the **beginning of each shift** to ensure that employees know what is compostable and what is not compostable.
 - Have **monthly goals** on pounds composted. **Share results** with a compost “thermometer” posted in the kitchen or employee area of the progress made. Reward staff when the goal is reached.

4) Shoot for the Stars! (Next Steps)

- Decrease garbage service.
 - Assess your garbage container and see if you can decrease the size and/or pickup frequency and save \$\$!
- Monitor contamination.
 - Have your Green Team or Compost Champion periodically check the compost containers for items that shouldn't be there such as plastic wrap, aluminum foil, and latex gloves.
- Expand and improve the program.
 - Continually gather advice from employees on how the signs and containers are set up around the restaurant. They are your **most frequent users**, and their feedback is invaluable!
 - If you started composting in the back-of-house, expand your program to the front-of-house.
 - Start a compost program in your **other locations or partner** restaurants.
- Advertise your program!
 - Post signs **throughout** your business about the compost program.
- Get recognized. Consider pursuing these certifications and awards.
 - Join the [We Compost program](#).
 - Become a [Guaranteed Green restaurant](#).
 - Take the [EPA's Food Recovery Challenge](#).
 - Apply for a [Governor's Sustainability Award](#).
 - Pursue [Green Business Certification \(IGBA\)](#).
- Close the loop!
 - Purchase finished compost to use on your landscape and planters.
 - Give some finished compost to employees as a thank you.

