Starting a Food Scrap Collection Program

Step 1: Receiving Your Food Scrap Carts(s)
Restaurants, grocery stores and other businesses that generate large volumes of food scraps receive one 65-gallon food scrap cart emptied twice a week per garbage service. Additional carts and more frequent pick-ups are available for a fee. Davis Waste Removal (DWR) and City Recycling Program staff can help pilot participants determine how many food scrap carts they will need.

Step 2: Setting up Compost Collection Bins
To make it easy for your staff to collect food scraps for composting, you might want to consider purchasing green, brown or yellow bins that are easily identifiable and are visually distinct from trash or recycling containers. These compost collection bins should be placed in locations where food scraps and other compostable materials are handled and discarded. This should include areas such as kitchen prep stations and sink/dish washing stations so plates can be scraped before they are washed. If you will be placing compost collections bins any customer-accessible areas (dining areas or retail floor), be sure to monitor the bins for contamination. While your staff may become experts in what can and cannot go into the compost bins, your customers may not be. Contamination from non-organic materials can ruin the composting process and may cause your food scrap carts to be emptied as trash.

To ensure success, place easy-to-read labels on all waste collection bins. Your staff and customers should be able to tell at a glance which bins are for paper, food scraps, plastic bottles and trash. You may need to have some labels translated so that it is more convenient for your staff. Posters are also very helpful as a quick reference and can be placed on or above the collection bins. Posters are available online at DavisRecycling.org.

Step 3: Staff Training
Training your staff is the most important step in the process because the success of your food scrap collection program depends on your staff’s understanding of what is and is not acceptable to place in the food scrap cart. Include specific training on separating recycling and food scraps in new employee training and have reminders at regular staff meetings. Let your staff know how you are doing in your diversion efforts— how much less trash you produce. The City’s website has posters, bin labels and an online training video to help your staff.

What Can Be Placed in the Food Scrap Cart?
Acceptable items in the food scrap carts include fruit, vegetables, pasta, bread, rice, dairy products, meat, coffee grinds & filters, tea bags, paper plates, paper towels, paper napkins and other food-soiled paper. No plastic bags, polystyrene take-out containers and other plastic and non-organic material.

Keeping your Compost Collection Bins Clean
To minimize the amount of mess left in the compost bins, you may want to consider lining the bin with a bag. There are a few options available:

Using Compostable Bags
You may use compostable bags for food-scrap collection. The bag and its contents can be emptied together into the food scrap cart. Consider purchasing bags that are color-coded or labeled as compostable so that they are easily identifiable and not mistaken for regular plastic.

Paper Bags
If you can find paper bags large enough to line your compost collection bin, this may be a easy way to keep your container clean. Paper bags can be placed in the food scrap cart.

Plastic Bags
If you choose to line your compost collection bin with plastic bags, please note that when the bins are dumped into the food scrap cart, the plastic bag MUST be removed from the food scraps. PLASTIC BAGS ARE PROHIBITED IN FOOD SCRAP CARTS. A cart of food scraps that contains plastic may be rejected and sent to landfill instead. Make sure that your staff is aware that the plastic bags CANNOT be put in the food scrap cart.

TIP: Employees should be warned not to try to lift compostable or paper bags out of the compost collection bin. These bags may break if filled with large amounts of moist, heavy food. Instead, the liner should be tied off securely, and the entire contents of the bin, liner and all, dumped into the food scrap cart.
Cleaning the Food Scrap Carts and Collection Bins

Food scrap carts and collection bins will need to be cleaned occasionally to help prevent potential odor and pest problems. Create a designated bin washing station and procedure, and rinse collection bins as needed. Be sure that rinse water drains to the sanitary sewer. Do NOT allow rinse water to drain into the street or into storm drains.

Here are some ideas for keeping your cart cleaner:

- Do not place liquids into the food scrap cart.
- Use compostable or paper bags to line collection containers and tie off the bags before placing them in the cart.
- If you are using compostable or paper bags to line your collection bins, empty the bins into the food scrap cart when they are 40%-70% full. This will prevent the bag from breaking and leaking.
- Staff may wish to wipe out carts as needed to remove remaining residues.
- Sprinkle smelly carts with vinegar or baking soda to remove odors.
- Keep the food scrap cart lid closed.

TIP: Place some newspaper or a piece of cardboard at the bottom of the food scrap cart to help prevent the food scraps from sticking to the bottom.

Health Concerns and Regulations

Food scraps are already in your trash and they are subject to the same health regulations as trash. Collecting food scraps does not create any new pest, odor or health hazards that are not already present in standard municipal trash. Currently, customers usually place food scraps in their garbage carts in plastic bags to avoid issues with pests and odors. Bagging food scraps in compostable or paper bags before placing them in the food scrap cart will achieve the same results.

Definitions

Food scraps (füd’ skrap): Food preparation wastes and uneaten food. Examples: leftovers, outdated bread, wilted lettuce, vegetable peels, and fruit pits.
Compost (käm’ pöst): 1: A soil amendment made from decayed organic matter. 2: The Process of turning organic matter into a soil amendment 3: Materials that are derived from living organisms.
Organics (ôr’ gan-ik): Materials that are derived from living organisms. Examples: food scraps, paper and cardboard.