

Remember to reduce before you reuse or recycle!

- Ask customers if they want a bag, utensils, or napkins before providing them.
- Consider whether you can stop using any disposable items (e.g. drink umbrellas, paper placemats, coasters, etc.). You can save money and give your business fun ambiance in other ways.



Reusing durable and washable dishes and containers is best.

- Earn good publicity—customers want sustainable products & services
- You can save money in the long term
- Reduce the impacts of manufacturing and shipping single-use products
- Reduce trash and dependence on landfills
- Avoid potentially toxic chemicals found in some disposables



Reuse strategies for takeout:

- Encourage customers to bring their own to-go containers:
 - Publicize that you allow this with signs, on your take-out menu, etc.
 - Give discounts to those who bring their own thermos, utensils, container
 - By request, serve food on washable dishes so customers can transfer leftovers to their containers
- Offer customers durable and reusable containers, dishes, or cups: customer pays a deposit for a container and receives that deposit back or another container when they return it. UVM has been doing this in their dining halls for years!



When single-use, disposable options are necessary:

- **Lighter and smaller is better**, so size the container for the quantity of food. Sometimes the lightest and thinnest container can be transported most efficiently, which is one of the best ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (even when that container is not recyclable or compostable).
- **Less packaging is better**, so if a napkin will suffice, just use a napkin. Do not bag or double bag something unless a customer requests it.
- **Buying items made with post-consumer recycled content is great.** To make sure our recyclables gets used, we need to buy products made from recyclables. Items made with recycled content produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions.



If you want to use recyclable or compostable containers or dishes, make sure you understand what can be recycled and composted in Vermont and locally. Flip the page to learn more.

When clean, these can go in mixed, blue-bin recycling:

- Cardboard and uncoated paper
- Foil, crumpled into a ball >2", aluminum pie plates, steel & aluminum cans
- Rigid plastic tubs, cups, and containers:
 - Currently, #1 and #2 are most recyclable
 - #5 is the next most recyclable



These items do not belong in mixed recycling:

- **Anything dirty** (except it's okay to recycle items with a bit of dried liquid or cardboard with only a bit of grease and no food attached)
- **Black plastic** (check locally, not recyclable in many parts of Vermont)
- **Plastic dishes and utensils**
- **Expanded polystyrene**, e.g. Styrofoam. Starting July 1, 2020, it will be illegal to provide these food and drink containers in Vermont, except for raw meat/ seafood.
- **Paper dishes & cups**. They are often coated with non-recyclable material or have a hidden layer of plastic or foil inside them (unless clean and 100% paper).
- **Plastic straws**. Starting July 1, 2020, it will be illegal to give customers plastic straws unless they are requested. (Does not apply to hospitals/nursing homes.)
- Anything **smaller than 2 inches by 2 inches**.
- **Items made from multiple materials**, such as drink cartons or pouches.



To design packaging that can be recycled, check out APR's Design Guide for Recyclability: plasticsrecycling.org/apr-design-guide/apr-design-guide-home

Thinking about compostable dishes or containers?

- 1) Ask your [food scrap hauler](#) or compost site if they accept compostable dishes or paper products (e.g. napkins, parchment paper). Many do not—they only accept food scraps and coffee filters, so your compostable dishes would go in the trash where they will not break down.
- 2) If your composter accepts compostable dishes or paper products, ask what brands they accept. **Not all products labeled "compostable" or "biodegradable" break down completely, so composters must be careful about what they accept.** When in doubt, purchase [BPI certified](#) products, a third-party that certifies that products will compost in large-scale compost facilities and that PFAS, a group of toxic chemicals, were not added to the products.
- 3) If you use compostable dishes, post clear signs so people know what to compost and what to trash. Train staff and develop strategies to make sure the compost bin stays free of trash.
- 4) Compostable dishes are not recyclable, unless they are 100% paper/cardboard and clean.



Have questions? Want help reducing waste? Many local waste management districts and towns offer no-cost waste reduction and management assistance (contact at 802recycles.com). VT DEC also provides free assistance—call 802-828-1138 to learn more.