



The Green Recycling Organic Waste (G.R.O.W.) Program

City and County of Honolulu Department of Environmental Services

Residential Curbside Collection System Changes to Green Compost Carts: Food Waste and Manufactured Compostable Materials Composting

Visit our Website!

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Questions?

Visit: honolulu.gov/env/grow

Call: (808) 768-3200

Email: opala@honolulu.gov



Summary

The City and County of Honolulu (City) Department of Environmental Services (ENV) is introducing the Green Recycling Organic Waste (G.R.O.W.) program by piloting select households to compost food scraps and wasted food through their automated curbside green compost cart collection service. The program will eventually include the collection of manufactured compostable materials (products labeled Compostable and Biodegradable). The City is starting with a pilot program to allow residents in Waipahu, Nānākuli, Hawai'i Kai, Mililani, Kailua, Kalihi, and surrounding areas of these towns that currently receive automated curbside service to add food scraps and wasted food to their green compost carts starting April 1, 2026. In the future, the City will expand this program islandwide.

This initiative supports the City's goal of achieving 95% landfill diversion by 2030. Food waste makes up about 20% of O'ahu's overall waste stream, which can be around 160,000 tons of overall food waste each year, of which about 60,000 tons comes from residential homes. When landfilled, food waste produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Composting food scraps and wasted food helps preserve landfill space, reduce methane emissions and turns food scraps and wasted food into nutrient-rich compost for local gardens and agriculture.

Mālama 'āina (caring for the environment) starts at home. By placing food scraps and wasted food in your green compost cart, you help reduce landfilled waste and greenhouse gas emissions, regenerate soil, and leave behind a healthier island for future generations.

The G.R.O.W. Program – Adding food scraps and wasted food to the green compost cart

Q: What curbside collection changes will happen on O'ahu?

A: Residents selected to be a part of the pilot program will be able to compost food scraps and wasted food through their curbside green compost carts beginning April 1, 2026. When the pilot program goes into effect, residents will be able to place food scraps and wasted food in their green compost carts, along with green waste, as part of regular collection services every other week.



Households currently receiving green compost cart collection services in the following neighborhoods and surrounding areas of these towns are part of the pilot program:

- Waipahu
- Nānākuli
- Hawai'i Kai
- Mililani
- Kailua
- Kalihi

If your household is in one of these neighborhoods, you would have received a mailer in February or March 2026 inviting you to participate.

At this time, Manufactured Compostable Materials, which includes packaging and containers labeled Compostable or Biodegradable, **WILL NOT** be accepted in green compost carts. In the future, the City will make announcements when compostable Manufactured Compostable Materials can go in green compost carts.

Regular trash, mixed recyclables, and green waste automated collection will continue to occur for all residents. View your cart collection schedule [here](#). The City will announce when all residents islandwide are able to place food scraps and wasted food in their green compost carts in the future.

Q: How will residential food scrap and wasted food collection work?

A: Refer to digital fact sheets and brochures for additional information at <https://honolulu.gov/env/grow>. Residents who are part of the pilot program can pick up a free kitchen collection pail or reusable silicone bag(s) at ENV public in-person workshops about the program or from the ENV office. If you cannot attend an upcoming in-person workshop, please contact the City's Recycling Branch directly at (808) 768-3200 or opala@honolulu.gov to arrange pick-up of a kitchen container. There will be no additional cost for the pick-up and use of a kitchen collection pail or reusable silicone bag(s).

Q: Why are food scraps and wasted food being added to green compost carts?

A: The acceptance of food scraps and wasted food in the residential curbside green compost program will help the City move closer to the goal of 95% landfill diversion by 2030, as outlined in the [2019 Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan Update, City and County of Honolulu](#). Organics make up 36% of the overall waste stream on O'ahu, with food waste comprising 20% of the total. By weight, O'ahu produces about 160,000 tons of food waste each year, of which 60,000 tons comes from residential homes.

Adding food scraps and wasted food to residential green compost carts will help the City reduce the amount of landfilled food waste and therefore conserve landfill space and reduce greenhouse gas emissions released by decomposing food waste. Food scraps and wasted food, along with green waste, will be turned into nutrient-rich compost that helps plant growth, prevents erosion, retains water, and blocks plant diseases and weeds.

CCH Bill 47, Ordinance 23-30, established a requirement for ENV to include the collection of food scraps and wasted food in the islandwide program for curbside collection of recyclable



materials by April 1, 2025. CCH Bill 28, Ordinance 25-24, extends the deadline for ENV to implement curbside collection of food scraps and wasted food to April 1, 2026.

Q: Do I have to participate in this new program?

A: This program is voluntary. However, residents are encouraged to participate.

Q: Why should I participate in this new program?

A: Mālama ‘āina is a Hawaiian value that means to care for the land and the people around us. We can all do our part to care for the environment and community. Adding food scraps and wasted food to green compost carts helps to divert waste from the landfill, which benefits the environment by reducing the amount of landfilled waste and the emitted greenhouse gases from food waste, and by contributing to the production of nutrient-rich compost to grow plants. By participating in this new program, you also help the City meet the waste sustainability goal to achieve 95% landfill diversion by 2030.

Q: Will there be changes to trash (gray cart) and mixed recyclables (blue cart) collection?

A: No. Trash and mixed recyclables collection will remain the same.

Q: Will there be changes to my collection schedule?

A: No. Your collection schedule will stay the same. You can view your schedule [here](#).

Q: Can I self-drop-off my food scraps, wasted food, and green waste?

A: Yes. All residents can self-drop off food scraps, wasted food, and green waste, free of charge, at the Hawaiian Earth Recycling composting facility at the Wahiawā location at 65-1101 Wilikina Drive, Wahiawā. The facility will accept a maximum of two self-drop-off loads per day. See the Hawaiian Earth Recycling website [here](#) for location hours. City Transfer Stations and Refuse Convenience Centers will not be accepting food scraps or wasted food. You may still drop off green waste into the specific green waste roll-off container or area at City transfer stations or convenience centers.

Food Scrap and Wasted Food Collection

Q: What food scraps and wasted food can go in the green compost cart?

A: The following food scraps and wasted food can go in the green compost cart:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Dairy products: Solids and semi-solids at room temperature (such as cheese and yogurt)
- Bread and baked goods
- Pasta, rice, grains, and cereal
- Beans, nuts, and seeds
- Meat, seafood, poultry, and bones (such as from fish and chicken)
- Eggshells, nutshells, and seafood shells
- Leftovers and spoiled food
- Table scraps and plate scrapings
- Loose coffee grounds and tea leaves/grounds



This is in addition to green waste that is already collected in your green compost carts:

- Grass clippings
- Leaves
- Branches
- Hedge trimmings
- Palm fronds
- Natural Christmas trees

Q: What cannot go in the green compost cart?

A: The following items cannot go in the green compost cart:

- Liquids
- Paper and paper products
- Plastic
- Metal
- Glass
- Fats, oils, and greases (FOG)
- Manufactured Compostable Materials (MCM): Products certified and labeled as Compostable and Biodegradable
- Pet waste
- Coffee cups
- Takeout containers and pizza boxes
- Fast food wrappers and packaging
- Corks, rubber bands, product stickers, and twist ties
- Dirt, rocks, bricks, and plant pots

Q: What about packaging, containers, and other products labeled Compostable or Biodegradable? Can I put them in my green compost cart?

A: No. Even if a product is labeled Compostable or Biodegradable, do not put it in your green compost cart. The City's compost facility cannot currently process Manufactured Compostable Materials, although the City is working towards accepting Manufactured Compostable Materials in the future.

Q: How should I store food scraps and wasted food before pick-up?

A: Store food scraps and wasted food indoors until collection day. Use a sealed kitchen container such as a kitchen collection pail, reusable silicone bag, or a repurposed container like a large yogurt tub. It is recommended to freeze food scraps until collection day. Empty the contents (food scraps and wasted food ONLY) from your container or bag directly into your green compost cart. Do not place any plastic bags or plastic containers in the green compost carts, as plastic will contaminate the compost. Please note that post-consumer food waste will be odorous and could cause a vector issue, thus freezing is recommended



Q: Should I remove spoiled food from my metal/glass/plastic container before placing the spoiled food into my kitchen counter container, reusable silicone bag, or the green compost cart?

A: Yes. Place food scraps and wasted food ONLY into the kitchen counter container, reusable silicone bag, or green compost cart.

Q: Can I use bags and compostable plastic liners to collect food scraps and wasted food, and then place it into the green compost cart?

A: No. Plastic bags and compostable plastic liners (including BPI-certified compostable and biodegradable bags) **cannot** go in the green compost cart. Food scraps and wasted food must be placed directly in the green compost cart with no bags.

Q: How can I minimize odors and pests?

A: Odors and pests can be minimized as follows:

Kitchen Containers

- Sprinkle baking soda in with your food scraps and wasted food to minimize odors.
- Keep kitchen containers fully sealed.
- Freeze food scraps and wasted food. Make space in your freezer to store containers in the freezer and empty containers the night before or the morning of collection day.*
- Wash and dry indoor kitchen containers and sealable storage bags after emptying the food scraps and wasted food.

Green Compost Carts

- Set your cart out biweekly on your collection day.
- Sprinkle baking soda in carts to minimize odors.
- Alternate layers of green waste and food scraps, starting with green waste on the bottom of the cart to help absorb any residual liquid.
- Keep carts in shaded areas.
- Keep lids tight on carts and always keep the lid closed.

*Please note that post-consumer food waste will be odorous and could cause a vector issue, thus freezing is recommended.

Q: Will the City provide tools or supplies to help me?

A: Yes! Residents can get a kitchen pail or reusable silicone bag for in-home collection at ENV in-person informational workshops or through pick-up at the ENV office at no cost to participating residents. If you cannot attend an upcoming in-person workshop, please contact the City's Recycling Branch directly at (808) 768-3200 or opal@honolulu.gov to arrange pick-up of a kitchen container. We also have guides and brochures to help you. Refer to the G.R.O.W. website for more information: <https://www.honolulu.gov/env/grow/>.

Q: What if I am already a backyard composter?

A: Continue to compost in your backyard! Backyard composting turns yard debris and food scraps, such as vegetable and fruit cuttings, into nutrient-rich compost for your garden. With



this new system, you can now put items in your green compost cart that should not go in your backyard compost pile, such as meat, bones, dairy, and grains.

Q: Can I use my garbage disposal for food scraps and wasted food?

A: Do not use your garbage disposals for food scraps and wasted food. Instead, compost your food scraps! Garbage disposals aren't meant to handle large amounts of food, which can cause problems at your home and in the City sewer system. Sending food solids into the sewer puts added stress on the system, and those solids must then be removed later. Fats, oils, and greases (FOG) are especially harmful to the City's sewer system and should be disposed of as trash in your gray cart. To dispose of FOG properly, place absorbant material such shredded paper into a plastic bag, pour in FOG contents, seal and place the bag into a cardboard box, and seal the box and place it in the gray trash cart.

General Information

Q: What happens to the food scraps and wasted food collected for composting?

A: The food scraps and wasted food are sent to the Hawaiian Earth Recycling composting facility at 65-1101 Wilikina Drive, Wahiawā. This is a commercial composting facility that uses specialized processes to break down organic matter. Post-consumer food waste such as dairy products, meat, eggshells, leftovers and spoiled food, and table scraps and plate scrapings will undergo special time/temperature requirements and pathogen testing at the composting facility. Compost from Hawaiian Earth Recycling is sold to landscapers, residents, and other agricultural users. Learn more at their website: <https://hawaiianearth.com/>

Q: Will the compost be available to residents?

A: You may purchase compost from Hawaiian Earth Recycling. Please refer to their website [here](#) for more information.

Q: Will I be part of this new service if I live in an apartment or condominium?

A: Currently, apartments and condominiums are not part of this new service.

Q: If live in an apartment/condominium, can I self-drop off waste at Hawaiian Earth Recycling?

A: Yes. Apartment/condominium residents islandwide can self-haul green waste, food scraps and wasted food, free of charge, directly to Hawaiian Earth Recycling in Wahiawā.

Q: Will there be any costs for this new service?

A: No. There will be no added costs to add food scraps and wasted food to your green compost cart.

Q: Will this new service increase my taxes?

A: No. This service is covered by the City's existing budget, operations, and staff.

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: The City will be sharing information through the ENV website, brochures, social media posts, and in-person public workshops.

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