

Consumable Food Serviceware Use Hierarchy:

For Restaurants, Food Service Establishments, Take Out Stands, Markets

1. Reusable

Durable, washable items that you can use multiple times should *always* be the preferred option (when possible). They save lots of resources that would have been needed to produce “throw-away” items. They can also save quite a bit of money in the long run.

2. Compostable in a backyard compost system (low-tech – consider for on-site aerobic compost bin style uses)

Products made entirely from uncoated paper or plant fibers will break down easily in a simple backyard compost pile. Certified compostable, “vegetable-derived” plastics don’t fit into this category, as they need higher temperatures and greater bacteria concentrations than are usually available in a backyard system. Simple, uncoated paper products and wood utensils fit best here.

3. Compostable in a commercial compost system (higher tech – adopt if commercial compost operations are accessible)

These items must be certified compostable (see Specifications for Compostable Products below). Often they are made from a combination of different compostable materials, like paper, wood, and/or 100% compostable vegetable-derived plastics that require a commercial compost system to fully break them down. Note: although most compost produced using vegetable-derived plastics (compostable plastic bags, etc.) breaks the materials down completely and contains no trace of them, compost produced from these materials is not approved by the Vermont Association of Composting for use on 100% organic gardens. Approved bioplastic cutlery (see study below) could work well in municipal compost programs.

4. Recyclable

Recyclable items are the lowest priority on this list because food and beverages are contaminants in a recycling system, and it can be extremely difficult to ensure that the recyclable items are clean and dry in a food-service establishment. Contaminants, like stuck-on food residue, lower the value of the recyclable materials and, in some cases, cause a bale of otherwise valuable recycled materials to be rejected by a recycling company and sent to a landfill instead.

Con’t.-→

Using recyclable products provides zero benefit unless care is taken to ensure that the items collected are clean, dry, and separated before delivery to a recycling facility. Ensuring this process requires constant monitoring and education, and can be *difficult* in many environments.

Here are a couple of standards/certifications to keep an eye on:

- Certified compostable (COMMERCIAL SCALE FACILITIES) by BPI (see logo), or



- Third-party tested to meet **ASTM D6400** or **ASTM D6868** standards for compostability. From US Compost Council.

Green Mountain Compost from Vermont has posted results from their trials with compostable PLA/bioplastic cutlery in their Aerated Static Pile Compost system, similar to small-to-medium scale municipal/commercial composting options available in NYS:

<https://www.greenmountaincompost.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Cutlery-Test-2013-2014-Final.pdf>

Switching to a few basic, easily (low-tech) compostable consumables like uncoated paper plates (Chinet and Seventh Generation make types that compost readily at home) and unbleached paper napkins – in conjunction with some reusables & recyclables as appropriate - could both set the stage for cost effective supply and sustainable organics management compatibility ahead.

For more information about Composting, Recycling, Household Hazardous Waste and Waste Disposal in Sullivan County please contact the Department of Solid Waste & Recycling at 845-807-0290.

