



Food and green waste recycling

Frequently asked questions



What is the Back to Earth Initiative?

The [Back to Earth Initiative](#)—is a social media campaign delivered in partnership with councils across Victoria—to help everyone understand how to use their council's food and/or green waste recycling service.

It shows us how our food and green waste collected at the kerbside is turned into something valuable—compost. This compost improves soil quality and structure, retains soil moisture, adds nutrients, reduces the need for chemical fertilisers, suppresses plant disease and pests and is helping farms, parks and gardens bloom across Victoria.

How does the Back to Earth Initiative work with my council?

The [Back to Earth Initiative](#) works with councils to help residents use their food and green waste recycling services correctly. The initiative shows us where the compost, made from our food and green waste, is used across Victoria.

What can I put in my green bin?

It's important you know [what can go in your green bin](#). Equally as important, is what not to put in your bin.

All councils that offer green waste recycling collection services accept waste from your garden. This includes lawn clippings, prunings from plants, weeds, twigs and small branches.

Some councils also accept food waste in your green bin. Food waste includes fruit and vegetable scraps, meat and fish bones, leftovers, egg shells, dairy and citrus.

Plastic bags, food packaging (including stickers on fruit and vegetables), rubbish and recyclables never go in your green bin. If you put them in the bin you will contaminate all the food and green waste collected in the same truck. If contamination is in your green bin, it ends up at the processing facility and has to be removed or it ends up on a farm or your local park. No one wants plastic and rubbish where we grow food or in our public parks and gardens.

The cost of removing contamination may impact on your council charges as contractors can recover these extra costs, which include removal, transport and disposal to landfill, which is expensive.

The Back to Earth Initiative website has information about [what your council collects in your green bin](#). Make sure you know what goes in your bin before using it.

Who collects my green bin?

Your council collects your green bin. Not sure which council you live in?

[Enter your suburb, town or address to find your council.](#)

Some councils employ a private company to collect the green bins. After the waste in your green bin is collected, it is taken to a commercial composting facility (sometimes a different company from the one who collected it) for it to be composted.

Once composted the compost is sold to different customers, including farmers, your council or retail garden centres.

I don't have a green bin (or it's gone missing or has been damaged), can I have one?

If you need a new bin, please [contact your council](#).



Why wasn't my green bin picked up?

If your bin has not been picked up by the morning after your collection day, please [contact your council](#).

How often is my green bin collected?

Each council has different collection days and frequencies. Most councils in Victoria collect green bins once a fortnight. Some councils collect their green bins weekly.

[Check with your council](#) about how often your green bin is collected.

How can I help?

You can help by [putting the right thing in](#) the green bin. Make sure you know what can go in your green bin before using it.

Can I bag up my food and green waste?

No. Plastic bags (even if they're biodegradable or degradable) cannot be put in green bins—we don't want plastic ending up in the compost made from your food and green waste.

If you prefer, you can use a sheet of newspaper or a piece of paper towel to wrap up food waste.

Some councils allow you to put your food waste in a compostable bag. These bags must meet Australian standard AS 4736 to ensure it will compost when it's taken to a processing facility. Check with your council before using compostable bags.

If your council accepts compostable bags in your green bin, look for this logo:



What are the benefits of recycling food and green waste?

There are lots of [benefits of recycling your food and green waste](#) including:

- reducing waste to landfill
- creating high quality compost
- reducing greenhouse gases.

What happens to my food and green waste?

The food and green waste collected by councils is turned into valuable mulch and compost that is used to nourish farms, parks and gardens across Victoria.

By making sure only the right items are going in the bin you are playing your part in returning valuable nutrients back to the earth. It is important to keep the wrong items out of the green bin so that they don't end up on farms and gardens. Incorrect items, like plastic bags, wire and nappies don't break down even if they are labelled compostable.

You can find out what happens to your food and green waste by visiting the [Back to Earth Initiative](#).



Where does the compost, made from my food and green waste, go?

After your food and green waste is composted at a commercial processing facility it is sold to farmers, councils and other users. It goes onto Victorian farms, orchards and vineyards. Councils and community groups are using the compost to nourish their parks and gardens.

The Back to Earth Initiative's compost in action map shows you where it's being used near you.

What if my council doesn't accept food waste in the green bin?

There are lots of options to recycle your food waste:

- set up a home composting system
- some apartment buildings have a communal garden with a composting system (if you've got a communal garden but don't have a compost system, why not set one up?)
- take your food waste to work if your office has a food waste recycling system
- find a neighbour or home composter living near you and use their home composting system

Will my food and green waste recycling bin attract pests?

Research shows that pests are not a common problem with food waste collections if food is kept in closed bins or containers.

Keep the lid of your green bin closed to decrease opportunities for pests.

If your bin lid is broken or does not fit properly, contact your council to fix or replace it.

Will my green bin smell with food waste in it?

Research shows people don't really notice any change in smell when they recycle their food waste in their green bin instead of putting it in their rubbish bin – especially if the green bin is collected weekly.

You can help minimise odours by sprinkling a little bicarbonate of soda in the green bin as you add food or wrapping food waste in a sheet of newspaper or a piece of paper towel (not other paper).

If you have a lot of meat or seafood bones, you can keep them in a sealed container in the freezer until the night before bin collection. Only throw the meat or seafood bones in the green bin and not the container.

Lawn clippings and plant prunings mixed with your food waste in the green bin will also help reduce odour.

How can I recycle my food waste if I live in an apartment?

There are lots of options to recycle your food waste if you live in an apartment:

- check with your council if they offer a food waste recycling service
- check with your landlord or body corporate if their waste collection contractor provides a food waste recycling service
- some apartment buildings have a communal garden with a composting system (if you've got a communal garden but don't have a compost system, why not set one up?)
- take your food waste to work if your office has a food waste recycling system
- find a neighbour or home composter living near you and use their home composting system.

How do I collect food waste in my home?

Use a caddy or container (an old ice cream container with its lid will work) in your kitchen to collect and carry your food waste to your green bin.

If you like, you could line your kitchen caddy with a sheet of newspaper. Newspaper absorbs liquid and makes it easier to keep the kitchen caddy or container clean.

Give your caddy or container a quick rinse with water each time you empty it.

Where do I get a caddy or container to collect food waste in the kitchen?

You can use any container (ideally with a lid) of your choice to collect food waste in your kitchen. Old ice cream or yoghurt containers with lids are good options to collect your food waste.

Some councils provide a kitchen caddy. Check with your council directly if they can provide one.

What if I already compost at home?

Recycling food waste through your council kerbside green bin collection complements your existing home compost. It doesn't replace it. Your council's food and green waste collection service allows you to compost food that can't be composted in small, home systems, including meat scraps and bones, fish and seafood waste, dairy, egg shells, citrus, onion and garlic. [Find out what can go in your green bin.](#)

By using your home compost and the council service, you can recycle 100% of your household food waste.

I don't compost at home but would like to, how do I get started?

Whether buying a bin or building your own, [home composting is easier than you might think](#). Even if you are a renter living in an apartment there are composting options for you.

Can I use a bag or liner in my kitchen caddy or container?

You cannot use plastic bags (or bags labelled biodegradable or degradable) in your kitchen caddy or container to collect food waste.

You can:

- put your food waste in the caddy or container loose
- use a single sheet of newspaper (not junk mail from your letterbox) to line the caddy or container
- check with your council if compostable bags can be used (not all councils allow compostable bags and if they do they must meet Australian compostable standards).

If your council accepts compostable bags in your green bin, look for this logo:



Do I need to take fruit and vegetable stickers off before recycling peelings and waste?

Yes. Please remove stickers off apples, avocados, pears and other fruit and vegetables before recycling peelings and scraps. These stickers do not break down when your food waste is composted either at home or at a commercial processing facility.

Will my kitchen caddy or container smell?

With regular emptying and cleaning, you shouldn't notice a smell from your caddy or container. The smell will also depend on the types of food waste you recycle. You can help minimise odours by:

- keeping the kitchen caddy or container sealed with a lid
- storing the kitchen caddy or container in the fridge when not in use
- emptying and rinsing your kitchen caddy or container frequently
- sprinkling a little bicarbonate of soda in it
- wrapping food waste in a sheet of paper towel
- storing meat or seafood bones and waste in a sealed container in the freezer until the night before bin collection.

Where can I put my rubbish or recyclables if my rubbish and recycling bins are full?

Even if your rubbish and recycling bin are full, your green bin should only ever have food and/or green waste in it. We all must do our bit and keep rubbish and recycling out of the green bin.

There are lots of [easy ways to reduce waste at home](#).

[Love Food Hate Waste](#) can help you reduce food waste with ideas, recipes, facts and resources.

If you regularly fill up your rubbish and/or recycling bin speak with your council about your options.

Can I put bones, citrus and onions in the green bin?

Some councils accept food waste in your green bin. Food waste includes fruit and vegetable scraps, meat and fish bones, leftovers, egg shells, dairy and citrus.

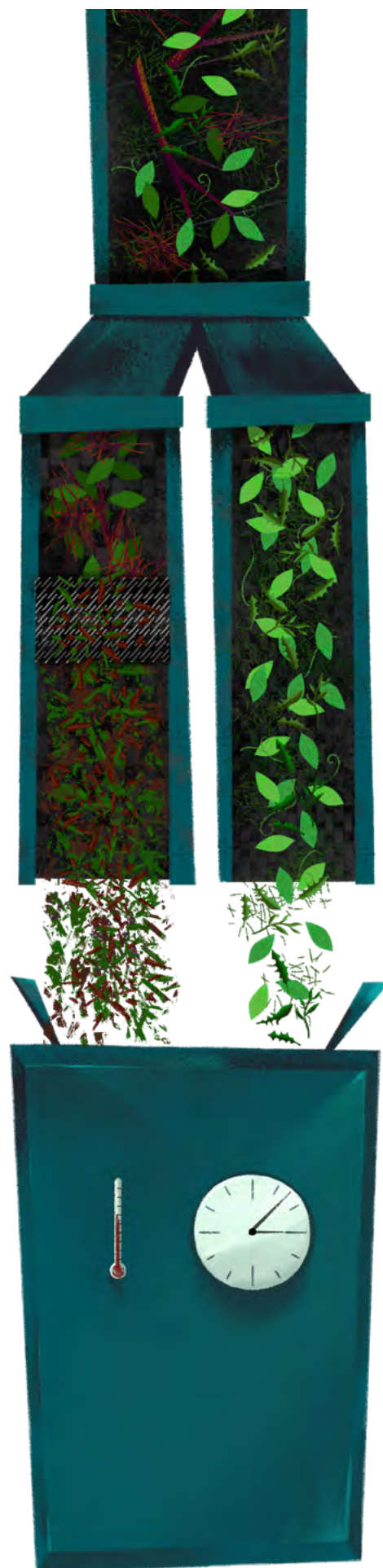
Check with your council if you can put food waste, including bones, citrus and onions in your green bin.

Can I put liquids like milk or oil in the green bin?

Liquids can create additional mess and smell in your green bin so you may want to avoid putting them in.

Household cooking oil can be stored in a sealable container or wiped up with absorbent paper and then disposed in your rubbish bin.

Cooking oils can be filtered and recycled into products such as bio-fuel, cosmetics and stockfeed. Find out [where you can recycle cooking oil near you](#).



Can I put pet poo in my green bin?

While pet poo and droppings will break down and turn into compost, they cannot be put in the green bin. The food and green waste put in your green bin is turned into compost which must meet Australian standards for sale. Under these standards there are strict limits on the amount of animal poo allowed. To help composters meet the standard, residents are asked not to dispose of pet poo in their kerbside green bin.

There are compost systems specifically designed for this (search the internet for “pet waste composting”). Alternatively, please ensure it is secured in a bag and disposed of in your household rubbish bin.

Can I put compostable packaging in my green bin?

Compostable packaging which meets Australian standards will break down in the compost. However, there are lots of different types of packaging which don't meet Australian standards for composting. To avoid non-compostable packaging ending up in the compost, we ask you to keep all forms of packaging, even if it's labelled compostable, out of your green bin. When the waste in your green bin goes to a composting facility it makes it hard for the composter to remove all the different types of packaging. By keeping all packaging out we're helping composters meet the standards for compost for farms and gardens.

Can I put compostable nappies in the green bin?

Many nappies, even when they're labelled compostable or biodegradable, contain chemicals or plastics that won't break down during the composting process.

In addition, the food and green waste put in your green bin is turned into compost which must meet strict Australian standards. Human poo is not allowed in this compost which gets used on farms and gardens.

What are the most sustainable nappies to use?

Each day 3.75 million nappies are used in Australia and New Zealand and they take up to 150 years to break down in landfill.

The only way to dispose of nappies is in a rubbish bin—even if they're labelled biodegradable or compostable. Nappies should never go in your recycling or green bins.

If nappies are making your rubbish bin smell a bit you can:

- wrap the nappy into itself using the tabs
- seal nappies tightly in plastic bags before placing in the rubbish bin
- where possible, tip the poo from the nappy into the toilet before putting the nappy in the rubbish bin
- store your rubbish bin in the shade and out of direct sun
- make sure your rubbish bin lid closes properly and there are no cracks in the bin sides
- use odour neutralising products in your rubbish bin like bicarbonate of soda.

Overall, cloth nappies tend to be the more environmentally friendly option. Find out how you can [use nappies more sustainably](#).



Can I put shells from seafood (e.g. mussels) in the green bin?

If your council accepts food waste in your green bin, you can put shells from seafood in. Shells soften and crumble during the composting process. They also add valuable calcium to the compost.



Can I put wood shavings and sawdust in the green bin?

A lot of timber used in construction, like treated pine, has been chemically treated in some way. If this timber goes through the composting process it can introduce contaminants into the compost which we don't want in our soils, particularly those growing food. It is very difficult for a commercial composting facility to tell the difference between treated and untreated timber so it must be removed.

Can I put tea bags in the green bin?

Tea bags are made from different materials, some of which don't compost. Some have cardboard tags which are plastic coated attached to the bag with a staple - the tag and the staple don't break down. Tea bags should go in the rubbish bin.

Can I put shredded paper in the green bin?

Paper breaks down at different speeds, some of which are too slow for a commercial composting facility, where the contents of your green bin goes. Paper, including shredded paper put into a paper bag to keep it together, should go in the recycling bin.

Can I put my Christmas tree in the green bin?

You cannot put your Christmas tree in the green bin. Some councils offer a Christmas tree collection service. Check with your local council about your disposal options where you live.

If you have an artificial tree and it is still in good condition, consider giving it to a friend, family member, selling it online or donating it to charity. If it is no longer in good condition, you will need to dispose of it in your rubbish bin (if it is small) or at your nearest landfill or transfer station. Check with your local council about your options for disposal.

[Find out about a sustainable approach to Christmas trees.](#)

Why do different councils accept different types of food and green waste in the green bin?

There are slightly different processes across Victoria for recycling food waste and green waste.

Each council has a specific arrangement with a composting facility that includes what can and can't be included in the green bin.

More and more councils accept food waste in their green bin collection service. Food waste collection helps reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. In some areas, up to 50% of the waste in rubbish bins is food and green waste. Collecting food waste in the green bins means it is composted and reused rather than going to landfill. There are significant social, economic and environmental benefits from recycling food and green waste.

Why do some councils allow compostable bags and others don't?

Councils send their food and green waste to different commercial composting facilities which have different processes to break down the waste into compost. Not all are suited to breaking down compostable bags. Check with your council to see whether they allow compostable bags in the green bin before you start using them.

If your council accepts food waste in your green bin but doesn't allow compostable bags use a single layer of newspaper or paper towel in your kitchen caddy or container.

What is the difference between degradable, biodegradable and compostable packaging and bags?

Degradable bags are made from plastic with other chemicals added (including heavy metals) that cause the plastic to break down and disintegrate over time when exposed to sunlight and heat. If degradable bags are released into our environment they become very problematic as they break down into hundreds of tiny pieces of plastic. It is much more difficult to remove hundreds of tiny pieces of plastic from the environment than it is to remove a single bag.

Like degradable bags, biodegradable are often still plastic bags that microorganisms if present, can break down the plastic.

Compostable bags are made of natural plant starch, and do not produce any toxic material. Compostable bags break down readily in a composting system through microbial activity to form compost. In order to be classified as compostable they must meet the Australian Standard for compostability AS4736 and will have this symbol.

If your council accepts compostable bags in your green bin, look for this logo:



How can I reduce my food waste?

There are lots of ways to reduce food waste by looking at what you purchase and how you prepare and cook food. Victorians waste an average of \$2,136 of food each year and nearly 50% of the average rubbish bin is food.

Sustainability Victoria's [Love Food Hate Waste](#) has lots of tips to reduce your food waste through:

- planning ahead
- smart shopping
- waste free cooking
- following basic food safety rules
- storing food correctly.

