

HOW

TO...

PURCHASE COMPOSTABLE SERVICEWARE



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW - COMPOSTING BASICS

As composting options expand across campus, it becomes increasingly important to understand what items are compostable. The chart below shows which items are approved for composting. Compost is very sensitive to contamination, so please use this as a guide as you consider which items to compost. One of the trickiest aspects of office composting is determining which serviceware is appropriate for the compost bin.

Your first choice should always be reusable serviceware, such as metal utensils or ceramic mugs. These eliminate waste!



Compost-Approved Logos

If you must use disposable serviceware, look for serviceware that is Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) certified. BPI is a third-party verifier that makes sure these products meet international composting standard ASTM 6400 requirements. BPI is the gold standard of compostable certification, and is the only logo that can be universally trusted with regards to compostable products. Either the packaging or the individual item should have a BPI logo on it. If a BPI logo is not present, it is safest to put the item in the trash (When in doubt, throw it out).

WHERE TO BUY COMPOSTABLE MATERIALS

If you have an existing stock of non-compostable serviceware, it is okay to finish off your existing supply and switch to compostable materials the next time you need to restock. The best resource for compostable materials is SmartMart. Under the "Favorites" folder you can find a list of "Compostable Break Room Supplies," which only contains items that have been verified as compostable. If you do not use Smart Mart, refer to the BPI website for a list of certified compostable materials, which you can often order directly from the manufacturer. One recommended manufacturer is World Centric which is headquartered right in the Bay Area and provides a variety of compostable cups, plates, bowls, containers, and utensils. World Centric is BPI certified and also has a variety of other green certifications. If you are putting on an event, try to select compost-friendly caterers. Stanford Catering is one group that has made the switch to providing compostable serviceware at events. Julie Muir can provide more information about good questions to ask potential caterers.



Stanford's food and compostable material goes to Newby Island Compost Facility where it becomes fertile soil and dirt!

Photo Credit: PSSI



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CONTINUED

HOW TO...

MORE INFORMATION

Compostable serviceware is a nuanced area. Read below to learn what to look for if a BPI logo is not present.



- **CUPS AND PLATES:** Typical plates and cups are lined with a plastic liner that makes them not compostable. This is usually noticeable as a sheen across the top of the plate or cup, and is made out of petroleum products unless explicitly stated as compostable. Paper plates and cups that are not coated are okay to compost.



- **UTENSILS:** When determining whether a utensil is truly compostable, the BPI certification is especially relevant. Many “plant-based” utensils are actually strengthened with petroleum-based plastics, which are not compostable. While utensils can be made with a variety of plant-based resins, including corn, bagasse, and potato starch, it is essential to learn what percent of the utensil comes from these materials in order to determine compostability. Again, BPI certification is the most fail-safe method of determination.



- **GREENWASHING:** Compostable serviceware are products very prone to false claims and “greenwashing,” or pretending an item is better than it really is. Don’t take an item’s claims at face value. Many terms like “compostable,” “biodegradable,” or “natural” are unregulated and can be claimed by any product without verification. If something is “Biodegradable” or derived from “bio-based plastics” or “plant starch”, it is not necessarily compostable, as it still may contain a blend of petroleum-based plastic in the material and may not break down within an acceptable time-frame. For these reasons, using products that are BPI certified is the safest option for composting.

MORE INFORMATION: PSSI/STANFORD RECYCLING CENTER:
http://bgm.stanford.edu/pssi_food_composting

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