

# Purchasing Compostable Food Service Ware



Making good choices when purchasing food service ware products can be quite complicated. That's because not all food ware marketed as "compostable" gets composted at the large-scale commercial composting facilities that process our county's food scraps and food-soiled paper. Many factors play a role, including the ability to distinguish compostable and non-compostable food ware, the food ware item's thickness as well as time spent going through the composting process.

While molded paper/fiber products generally break down, some other products—even if certified by the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI)\*—may decompose only partially or not at all. This guide aims to assist you in selecting the best single-use compostable products currently available when reusable food ware is not an option.

## Preferred

- Molded natural fiber/paper products
- Uncoated or coated with BPI-certified\* film
- Wood-based chopsticks and flatware, such as "birchware"



## Reusable service ware is best!



Before you shop for compostable products, please consider durable, reusable dishes and flatware where possible.

For example, offer disposable service ware only for "to-go" orders.

## Okay

- BPI-certified\* compostable plastics
- Paper products coated with non-compostable plastic film
- BPI-certified\* flatware



## Avoid

Avoid products that are **NOT** labeled BPI certified and/or carry unsubstantiated claims.

**These claims DO NOT mean compostable:**

- |                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Made from plants         | • Will decompose        |
| • Green                    | • Photodegradable       |
| • Environmentally friendly | • Made from corn starch |
| • Biodegradable            | • Bio-based             |
| • Degradable               |                         |

## \* BPI CERTIFIED

Look for this logo to know if the product you are purchasing has been tested and certified by the Biodegradable Products Institute.



# Tips & Resources

**NOTE:** For many businesses in Alameda County, composting food scraps and compostable paper is the law. Learn the rules at [www.RecyclingRulesAC.org](http://www.RecyclingRulesAC.org).

## Tips

- Provide staff and customers with a green/organics bin to sort food scraps, food-soiled paper and compostable food service ware so these items get composted as intended. Even truly compostable food service ware will not get composted if thrown away in the trash.
- Before purchasing, check with your waste hauler or local jurisdiction to find out if the products you have selected are accepted and processed at your city's composting facility.
- Simplify sorting for customers and reduce contamination by providing all compostable food service ware rather than mixing compostable, recyclable and trash-only products.
- Can't find a compostable product option for your needs?  
Recyclable plastic food containers may be a viable alternative.



## Learn More

- **Navigating Compostable Plastics**  
A toolkit compiled by the US Composting Council  
<http://cptoolkit.org>
- **Purchasing BPI-certified compostable products**  
About BPI-certified products: [www.bpiworld.org/products.html](http://www.bpiworld.org/products.html)  
Find vendors: <http://products.bpiworld.org/companies/category/foodservice>



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