

SOMERVILLE CURBSIDE FOOD WASTE COLLECTION PILOT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Curbside Food Waste Pilot Program Design

Who is eligible for Somerville's curbside food waste collection pilot program?

The pilot will initially provide no-cost curbside food waste collection for a limited number of households in a portion of East Somerville. Eligible households must:

- be located within the pilot neighborhood
- be located in a building with 6 units or fewer
- not be actively enrolled in a curbside composting program

Why is Somerville launching the curbside food waste collection pilot program?

This pilot program is intended to explore ways to reach residents not already composting to expand composting in Somerville. Expanding composting in Somerville will provide immediate neighborhood benefits and help the City achieve its sustainability goals.

As described in [Somerville's Zero Waste Plan](#) and [Climate Forward 2024](#), the city has set a waste diversion goal to reduce the amount of waste generated in the city 30% by 2030 and 90% by 2050. In Massachusetts, plant and animal waste and compostable paper account for approximately 30% of municipal solid waste, so municipal composting is a key action toward the city's waste diversion goal. Composting also promotes zero waste principles, raising awareness of consumer consumption and giving residents an opportunity to grow a culture of climate action that will make a difference in their community and beyond.

According to the City's [Consumption-Based Emissions Inventory](#), food, including food waste, is the single largest source of resident carbon emissions within Somerville's borders, outpacing both transportation and housing-related activities like heating and residential electricity use. Avoiding food waste and only buying as much food as households need is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to avoid food emissions.

When does the pilot program end?

The pilot program ends in mid-2027. The sooner residents sign up, the longer they will have to benefit from the program.

How did the City of Somerville decide on the initial pilot program area?

The City of Somerville evaluated many factors in the selection of the initial pilot area for the food waste collection pilot program. East Somerville was selected to evaluate the potential for a food waste collection program to reduce food resources available to rodents and gather information on the feasibility of a citywide food waste collection program. The [2023 City of Somerville Zero Waste Program Plan](#) discusses the plan for a neighborhood-focused curbside food waste collection pilot program (see Strategy 2.1 – Develop City-Wide Opportunities for Organics Diversion).

If I live in a multi-unit building, should each unit sign up separately?

Yes, each unit in your building should sign up separately, and will receive their own kitchen countertop and curbside bin.

Can renters sign up for the pilot program?

Yes, renters can participate in the pilot program. The person signing up for the pilot program should be live at the given address because they will be the person that receives service updates and other important information about participating in the pilot program. It is recommended that renters and landlords communicate with each other about interest in the pilot program.

What options do residents have to compost if they aren't a part of the pilot program?

Members of the Somerville community voted to fund [a new pilot program for rodent-resistant compost drop-off bins around the city](#). The drop-off bin project is in development.

[Any Somerville resident not eligible for the pilot program can also subscribe to a paid curbside composting service.](#)

Any Somerville resident not eligible for the pilot program can subscribe directly with Garbage to Garden for weekly collections at the standard rate of \$19/month. This includes a fresh compostable liner provided weekly with service, and if requested, weekly deliveries of finished bagged compost (seasonally available April to October). Residents receiving paid service are able to volunteer for approved opportunities to earn free service.

Information about Composting**What is curbside composting?**

Curbside composting is a way to recycle food scraps and compostable materials through a pickup service rather than composting at home or by dropping off food scraps at a collection bin. Composting has numerous benefits for air quality, clean water, and soil. Food scraps have the correct ratio of nutrients that plants need to grow. By composting your food scraps, including meat, dairy, and bones, you're putting nutrients back into the soil instead of wasting them!

What are the benefits of composting?

There are so many benefits to composting! Garbage to Garden curbside composting participants are routinely surprised by how much their new compost bin positively impacts their household. You get much more than food waste pickup!

Financial & Convenience Benefits:

- Greatly reduces trash volume
- Eliminates trash odor
- Keeps kitchen cleaner and trash easier to carry
- Easy, locking lid keeps odors in and critters out

Environmental and Community Benefits:

- Supports school and community programs
- Shows others in your neighborhood that composting is important
- Reduces landfills and methane emissions
- Increases soil fertility
- Increases nutrition of food grown in compost
- Cleans water bodies and reduces stormwater run-off

- Improves air quality

Instructions for Participants

How does composting with Garbage to Garden work?

Each week, Garbage to Garden will collect your food scraps at the curb. Residents receive a starter kit, including their 12-gallon rolling/locking curbside bin, a kitchen container, a roll of certified compostable liners, and a How-to booklet detailing service, best practices, accepted items, and Garbage to Garden's contact information. It is recommended that residents line their bins (with a brown paper bag or certified compostable liner) to help maintain a clean bin and minimize deep cleaning. Liners also help ensure that Garbage to Garden field operators are able to fully empty bins.

Instead of throwing food scraps, bones and meats, seashells, paper products, and other compostable material into the trash, put those items in your Garbage to Garden bin instead. Each week, you will place the bin at the curb by 6 a.m. for collection. Garbage to Garden then brings the food scraps to local Massachusetts farms to be composted.

How much does it cost?

Eligible residents within the East Somerville pilot area receive a no-cost starter kit (including their curbside bins) and no-cost weekly collections.

Any Somerville resident not eligible for the pilot program can subscribe directly with Garbage to Garden for weekly collections at the standard rate of \$19/month. This includes a fresh compostable liner provided weekly with service, and if requested, weekly deliveries of finished bagged compost (seasonally available April to October). Residents receiving paid service are able to volunteer for approved opportunities to earn no-cost service - sign up for the monthly newsletter at garbagetogarden.org/get-involved.

What can I put in my bin?

Accepted Food Waste and Compostables

ALL food scraps! "If it grows, it goes!" This includes:

- Vegetables & fruit (including citrus, pits, peels, & seeds)
- Bread, grains, pasta
- Cooked food, raw food & spoiled food
- Meat & bones
- Seafood shells, shrimp, fish
- Dairy, cheese, eggs
- Coffee grounds, filters & tea bags
- Napkins and food-soiled paper towels
- Hair & pet hair
- Wine corks (natural cork, not plastic) & toothpicks
- Cut flowers
- Certified Compostables (look for BPI, CMA or OK Compost certification)

Items NOT Accepted

- Plastics and Styrofoam
- Paper coated with plastic or foil

- Chemicals or pesticides
- Metals
- Glass
- Any inorganic material
- Pet Waste and Diapers
- Plastic wrap, tin foil, condiment packets
- Twist ties, stickers, staples & rubber bands
- Pizza boxes - place in blue bin for single-sort recycling

Can I put yard waste into the bin?

Please keep yard waste separate from food waste. Cut flowers and houseplants thinner than a pencil can be composted in your curbside bin.

Yard waste should be disposed of according to the [instructions from the City of Somerville](#).

What do I do with cooking oil?

Garbage to Garden will also collect your used cooking oil. Place the cooking oil in a container with a tight-fitting lid next to your curbside bin. Any container with a lid is acceptable, but to minimize the potential for breakage, a plastic container is preferred.

What happens if my bin gets damaged? What do I do if I need a replacement bin?

To request a replacement curbside bin, please contact Garbage to Garden at info@garbagetogarden.org or (617) 977-4547.

How do I offboard from the pilot program if I'm moving?

If you think you'll still be eligible at your new address, contact Garbage to Garden to update your address and schedule your change of service (final collection at current address/first collection at new address) by calling (617) 977-4547, or by emailing info@garbagetogarden.org.

If you don't think you'll be eligible at your new address, please notify Garbage to Garden of your final pick up date. Enrollment in this program is limited, so we do ask that you let us know if you will not be using the service so your spot can be given to someone else.

What is the "life cycle" of my food scraps once Garbage to Garden picks it up?

For Garbage to Garden, community composting is all about composting locally. That means, whether participants are in Maine or Massachusetts, their food scraps are being composted close to home, at local farms. Most materials collected in Somerville are planned to go to Brick Ends Farm in South Hamilton, MA.

The composting process Garbage to Garden's partner farms use is thermophilic, which means piles sit at temperatures of between 140 and 160 degrees. These high temperatures allow Garbage to Garden to accept items that are not recommended in a home compost, like meat, bones, dairy, seafood and more. Due to the high temperatures maintained over a prolonged period of time, this process is able to kill most pathogens (things like viruses and fungus that cause diseases). What this means is that the composting process is able to break organics down quickly and kill the bad stuff, leaving us the good stuff to use!

All of the finished compost is suitable for organic gardening and crop production, and is used by Garbage to Garden's partner farms to grow local food. Pilot participants in the curbside composting are also able to purchase finished compost for \$6/bag (see below).

Can I purchase finished compost?

Yes! Households participating in Somerville's curbside food waste collection pilot program can order bags of organic compost from Garbage to Garden for \$6/bag (including delivery) by emailing info@garbagetogarden.org or calling (617) 977-4547. For participants of Garbage to Garden's standard subscription service, bagged compost is free.

While your food scraps are composted locally in Massachusetts, the bagged compost that Garbage to Garden distributes to participants is processed at Garbage to Garden's farm in Windham, Maine, as this is where Garbage to Garden's bagging equipment is located. Finished compost distributed by Garbage to Garden in both Massachusetts and Maine is approved for use in organic gardening by MOFGA (the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association).

Will it smell?

Garbage to Garden's curbside 12 gallon bin features a tight fitting lid with a latch to close securely, sealing in odors. It is recommended that residents line their bins (with brown paper bags or compostable liners) to help keep the bin clean week to week. The liners allow for easy removal of food waste on collection day, easy wipe-downs of the container for maintenance, and help prevent spills from any liquids when tied shut.

For particularly smelly food items (like meat scraps, seafood shells, or expired dairy), a common practice is to store those food scraps in a small container in the freezer or fridge until your service day. Many participants use the small counter-top bin to collect daily food scraps and empty it into the compost bin as it fills. This limits the number of times you open the curbside bin to help reduce any odors.

Will composting attract rodents or pests?

Similar to unwanted smells, unwanted pests should not be an issue if the compost bin is properly maintained. Keeping the bin closed and secure will help prevent flies or bugs from hanging around a kitchen container. If the bin is kept outside, making sure the lid is on and locked can prevent rodents and other critters from making a mess. Using the fridge/freezer method (mentioned in the answer above) with meat, dairy, or seafood scraps can be an extra precaution for avoiding attracting pests to your bin.

Does Garbage to Garden offer composting services outside of Somerville?

Garbage to Garden has curbside subscription services in Somerville, Melrose, and Revere, as well as city-funded programs in partnership with the City of Boston and the City of Medford. Commercial services are also available for businesses, schools, restaurants, hospitals and more in the Greater Boston Area.

Does Garbage to Garden and its composting partners test for PFAS?

The finished compost distributed by Garbage to Garden in both Massachusetts and Maine is approved for use in organic gardening by MOFGA (the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association). Garbage to Garden aims to reduce the possibility of PFAS by monitoring for contamination and making adjustments to accepted items as needed.

How can I prevent my food scraps from freezing in my curbside bin when it's cold out?

Food scraps are often wet and can freeze when temperatures drop in the winter. By bagging your food scraps and lining your curbside bin, you can prevent food scraps from freezing in and around your bin's wheel wells.

Who should I contact if I have any other questions?

Customer service for this program is provided by Garbage to Garden. For more questions or information, please contact Garbage to Garden at info@garbagetogarden.org or (617) 977-4547. Regular office hours are 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday. If you need assistance translating or understanding customer service assistance from Garbage to Garden, please call 311 (617-666-3311) or contact us at languageaccess@somervillema.gov. The City of Somerville can provide you with an interpreter for free.