

## Composting Overview

You may have noticed the black-and-blue compost bins in various areas throughout the library. Congrats, keen-eyed observer! These have been placed for your use. If you haven't noticed, please take a look around. The following locations presently sport a bin:

- Main Office
- Cyber Café and Sparty's
- Circulation
- Course Materials (2W)
- Hallway between Maps and Turfgrass (3W)
- Staff Lounge (4W)
- The Treehouse (4W office park)
- Other locations TBD—please ask if you'd like a bin near you!

The Library Environmental Committee, with administrative support, has agreed to participate in a pilot composting project with MSU Sustainability. What does that mean? Well, basically, it means you can safely discard your used paper plates, napkins, coffee grounds, and other **organic material** in a way that keeps it **out of the landfill**. But there are other benefits, too.

The bins you'll see around have snap-on lids that keep odor contained, so you won't need to run all the way to a restroom trash can to keep from smelling Monday's lunch all week, and you won't need to worry about attracting pests.

Collections will be made at least once or twice per week. This being a pilot project, communication will be key! Please don't hesitate to raise any concerns or questions with me—comments on bin placement, fullness, use or misuse, or questions of any kind are welcome. If I can't directly respond, I'll get in touch with our Sustainability partners to find answers.

Even if it looks like your bin isn't used much, its presence will help Sustainability gather data. They have been enthusiastic about working with us, in particular, to gauge the possibility of composting all over campus! That doesn't mean you're being forced to tolerate anything you'd rather not, but it does mean that we would appreciate your input, whether it's positive, negative, or indifferent.

Even if this project doesn't fit for us, it can still succeed just by raising awareness, so please don't be shy.

Thanks for all you do to support our wonderful, green space!

Jonah

[magarjon@mail.lib.msu.edu](mailto:magarjon@mail.lib.msu.edu)

517-884-0827

## What do I compost?

Posted near every compost bin will be this **list of items**:

### **ACCEPTED**

Fruits

Vegetables

Coffee grounds and filters

Tea bags

Empty paper cups

Paper plates, napkins and towels

Compostable flatware

### **NOT ACCEPTED**

Meat, chicken, fish

Dairy

Fast food

Processed food

Greasy food scraps

Fat, oil

Please push the lid on the bin until it **snaps closed** whenever you use one!

## FAQ

We've already had a few questions come up, so here are the answers we have so far:

Q: Should I push down on a compost bin's lid until it **snaps** every time?

A: Yes please! This is the only way to surely keep odor and pests away.

Q: Where does the compost go?

A: It will be processed (mixed and shredded) at the MSU Recycling center. It will then go to one of two composting locations: Sustainability headquarters, or the Student Organic Farm.

Q: Why not put it into the anaerobic digester? I hear that creates electricity!

A: The digester is very sensitive to paper products and other contaminants, so only carefully monitored compost is allowed to be processed through it. Perhaps, one day, science will upgrade it to the point of the flying car from Back to the Future, which ran on pure garbage. We're not quite there yet.

Q: Where should I put an item, such as a paper coffee cup, that could be recycled *OR* composted?

A: Recycling is preferred over compost—provided it's clean. Many paper coffee cups are lined with plastic (some are with wax, but not many) so they are better suited for recycling. In addition, we employ the term "Highest Use, Best Use," which means if it can be reused, upcycled, or recycled, it should be done. Paper products can be made into secondary paper products (napkins and the like) before being composted.

Q: Can I compost the cups for my Keurig coffee maker?

A: Unfortunately, no, you can't. Even some third-party K-cups that claim to be biodegradable have some portion of material that won't break down as quickly as the items on the "accepted" list. We're looking into whether that portion is removable from the rest of the packaging; we'll keep you posted.

Q: Why are we doing this?!

A: We were approached by Sustainability because of our "awesome," pioneering support for environmental initiatives on campus in the past. The data gathered by this project will be used to assess the whether campus is ready for composting beyond the Recycling Center, dining hall kitchens, etc.

Q: Where can I get compostable can liners like the ones in these bins?

A: There's a similar product called "Biobag" that may be purchased online or in stores. The liner we use was created by a Chemical Engineering Professor here at MSU by a company called NatureTec; we're using these ones to support him (and they're a few cents cheaper per unit!). For those interested, be sure they use liners certified ASTM D6400- "Bio-Degradable" does not mean "Compostable". Only material with that designation can be composted. Also, they may notice labels stating "Compostable in industrial composting facilities only". Those labels exist because the material takes a few years to

completely decompose. The average home composter may be discouraged to find little bits of plastic in their garden come springtime!

Q: I have decomposing food that someone left in the fridge.

A: That's not a question, but PLEASE DON'T PUT THAT INTO A COMPOST BIN! While you could theoretically do so, this would create an undue odor that will not make anyone happy. Please toss items like this into a trash bin that's collected daily, or take them home for disposal.