



MONTGOMERY PARKS



# How to Host a Sustainable Internal Event

## Before the Event

- Set a waste reduction goal that can be easily measured.
  - Example: Divert 80% of the event's waste from the landfill by composting and recycling. Measure success through weight or volume (number of trash bags).
  - Remember to set a reasonable goal and work to improve upon it after each event.
- Determine what data you plan to measure and how you will collect the data.
  - View the [Sustainable Event Guide - Data Collection Form](#) to see what information the Sustainability Team requests after an event.
- Follow the four Rs of sustainable waste management: **Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle/Rot.**
  - **Refuse:** Don't buy items that can't be recycled/reused or are unnecessary. Review [Appendix B](#) for a list of reusable items.
  - **Reduce:** Minimize wasteful consumption. Only purchase necessary items; borrow items from other sections.
  - **Reuse:** Reuse items from previous events such as tablecloths, serving platters, decorations, and signage. Create signs that don't use specific dates or use a patch to update dates.
  - **Recycle/Rot:** Make sure any disposable items can be recycled or composted. Provide bins with proper signage and inform guests on how to properly sort waste. Most plates, cups, and disposable flatware cannot be recycled, so provide compostable options.

Garbage, which should be re-designated as "landfill", is the least preferred option.
- Choose a location for the event that is accessible.
  - Encourage public transportation or carpooling in a commission vehicle or Lyft for Business.

- Choose a venue that has the infrastructure to support minimizing waste.
  - Are recycling bins available at this site?
    - All indoor facilities have recycling and trash receptacles.
    - For outdoor events
      - Recycling bins in the parks are only for comingle materials (plastic, glass, and metals), they do not accept mixed paper.
      - If the site does not have recycling bins, bring your own and discard into a designated recycling receptacle after the event.
  - Is there an area on-site to wash reusable items?
  - Is water available?
- Purchase reusable event supplies.
  - Platters, drink dispensers, serving utensils, decorations, nametags, etc.
  - Over time compile these supplies and build a zero-waste kit that can be stored at your office facility, or travel to events you host.
- Create Resource Recovery Stations: A Resource Recovery Station consists of three bins labeled Landfill, Recycling, and Compost/ Organics.
  - It is recommended to have one station per 100 people.
  - At larger events, assign staff to monitor the station and educate attendees on what waste goes where and why.
- Compost: Utilize Pope Farm which accepts compostable dishware and all food waste.
  - Make sure to first acquire compostable items like napkins, plates, cups, and utensils.
  - Review Appendix A for instructions on how to compost at Pope Farm and a list of compostable dishware.
- Select a food vendor who uses sustainable practices such as:
  - Is a local and/or small business.
  - Is willing to work with you to achieve your sustainability goals.
  - Has reduced food packaging and/or no plastic packaging.
  - Avoid boxed lunches and opt for buffet style.
  - Provides reusable or compostable dishware options, or lets you provide your own
  - Full-service catering often can provide reusable dishware for an upcharge.



- Be mindful of event giveaways: Are they necessary? If so, select reusable/practical items made of sustainable materials that can support a sustainable lifestyle, examples:

- Gift cards to a local business or restaurant.
- Travel reusable utensil sets or straws.
- Reusable shopping bags (made from recycled cotton or plastic)
- Reusable produce bags
- Indoor herb garden kit
- House plants
- Reusable tumblers or water bottles (preferably made from non-plastic materials)



- Use digital event invitations that instruct attendees to bring their own reusable water bottle, food containers for leftovers, and encourage carpooling.

## During The Event

- Set up Resource Recovery Stations and signage near exits and food service.
- Arrange reusable and compostable items needed for food service and decorations.
- Make an announcement at the beginning of the event that it is a sustainable event. Make note of the sustainable features of the event and quickly inform attendees of waste stations and waste management protocols.
- Consider assigning staff to each waste station as educators.
- Assign at least one or more staff as waste collectors to pull bags from receptacles before they overflow and weigh or count bags to determine how much waste was diverted from the landfill.
- If needed, assign at least one staff member to oversee recycling and/or compost drop off.
- Check food service and monitor the level of food waste 15 minutes before the end of the meal. If there is left over food, encourage staff to take food home.

## After the Event:

- Measure and record the amount of waste your reduction efforts diverted from the landfill.
- Communicate your success with attendees and the Sustainability Team.
  - Fill out the [Sustainable Event Guide - Data Collection Form](#) - Share how much waste was reduced using reusables, how much was composted/recycled, and how much was avoided.
  - Include photos as well so the Sustainability Team can highlight your efforts Department-wide.
- Reflect on what worked well and what you could improve the next time.
- See [Appendix A](#) for instructions on dropping compost off at Pope Farm.



# Appendix A (Composting)

Internal staff events can utilize Pope Farm for composting. Please note this is not an option for public events.



## How to compost at your event:

Ensure you have a collection bin, bags, and signage for the compostable materials from your event.

- **Bin:** Use a green bin to make it clear which bin is composting.  
A 23-gallon bin works best.
- **Bags:** The most sustainable option would be to not use a bag — but if that is not possible, consider a compostable plastic bag, or a clear plastic trash bag.
- **Signage:** Create signage with photos of the items you will have at your event, but if that is not possible, use one of our template [signs](#).



**NO BAG**  
or



**Landfill** 

**Food Wrappers**  
  
**Plastic Bags**  
  
**Condiment Packets**  


**Commingled Recycling** 

*Place all **EMPTY** metal cans and plastic/glass bottles in the commingled bin!*



**Compost** 

*Place all food, compostable disposable dishware, and napkins in the compost bin!*  
**DO NOT DUMP LIQUIDS INTO THE COMPOST BIN**





## Appendix A (Composting)

🕒 **Purchase compostable disposables for your event.** While Pope Farm does accept compostable plastics, those items do take longer to break down. Below are some options listed from most preferable to least preferable:

### • Compostable Silverware

- [Bamboo cutlery](#): Bamboo is a natural, renewable resource, and its production process is low impact.
- [Wooden cutlery](#): Wooden material is not as sustainable as bamboo but is 100% biodegradable.
- [Compostable plastic cutlery](#): Look for BPI (Biodegradable Product Institute) or CMA (Compost Manufacturing Alliance) certification prior to purchasing. Often a cheaper option than bamboo or wood.



### • Compostable Plates

- [Palm leaf plates](#): Made from naturally fallen palm leaves and have a low environmental impact. However, these plates are more expensive than other compostable plates.
- [Bagasse paper plates](#): These are timber-free paper plates made from bagasse. Bagasse is industrial 'waste' product from processing sugarcane.
- [Bamboo paper plates](#)
- [Compostable paper plates](#): Paper is made from typical processes, but this plate is still fully compostable.



### • Compostable Bowls:

- [Bagasse paper bowls](#)
- [Bamboo paper bowls](#)



### • Compostable Cups:

- [Bagasse paper cups](#): Can be used for cold or hot drinks.
- [Bamboo paper cups](#): Can be used for cold or hot drinks.
- [BPI-certified compostable plastic cups](#): Sometimes can be a cheaper option. Look for BPI or CMA certification prior to purchasing.



## Appendix A (Composting)

- **Collect compost at the event.** Make sure there is no contamination in the compost bags.

### **Acceptable items include:**

- All food waste, including meat, dairy, and animal bones
- Compostable dishware
- Wooden stirrers
- Used napkins

- **Drop off the compost at Pope Farm** (7400 Airpark Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20879) **during these hours:**  
**Monday thru Friday from 7am to 3pm. Event compost drop off is in the green waste processing area.**



- When you enter Pope Farm, keep going straight past the nursery. Once the road curves you should see large mulch piles. Make a left down the dirt road. Once you reach the office you should see a wooden crate with two large green trash cans.
- **Place your bagged compost into the trash cans.** Non-compostable plastic bags are fine, the staff will empty the contents into the pile and throw away the plastic bag.

## Appendix B (Items to Refuse)

### **✗ Single-use plastic items:**

- ✗ Water bottles
- ✗ Straws
- ✗ Cutlery
- ✗ Cups

### **✗ Single-use plastic decorations:**

- ✗ Disposable tablecloths
- ✗ Rubber or mylar balloons
- ✗ Confetti
- ✗ Signage or banners

### **✗ Unsustainable giveaways**

