

The DSNY Curbside Composting Collection (Brown Bin Program) Apartment Sign Up Guide

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This is a guide to help NYC residents, specifically renters, advocate to have their apartment building sign up for the Curbside Composting Collection program (*Brown Bin program*) that is starting back up this fall. This guide includes Resources, Steps to Take, Sample Communications, and Frequently Asked Questions.

While this program is commonly referred to as “curbside composting”, in reality organics collection is taking place. The DSNY is collecting organic waste (such as your kitchen scraps, food-soiled paper, and yard waste) and taking it to facilities where these materials will be turned into finished compost or renewable energy.

Resources:

- [Curbside Composting Overview \(Brown Bin program\)](#)
- [Makecompost.nyc](#)
- [List of Compost Organizations](#)
- [Community Compost Educational Resources](#)
- [NYC Food Scrap Drop-Off Sites during COVID-19](#)

Steps to Take: *(this is specific to my situation. I am a renter and I live in a Condo building, please feel free to adapt this resource to your own situation):*

1. [Sign up](#) for the Curbside Composting Form. Even if your building isn't eligible yet you should still sign up to show that there is demand in your neighborhood for this service.
2. Talk to neighbors about the Brown Bin program.
3. Learn if anyone composts or seems interested in learning about it in your building. *(Tactics to try: Door knocking, Texting, & Emailing)*
4. Share the DSNY [Curbside Composting Form](#) with any interested neighbors.
5. Determine who is on the Condo Board, how often they meet, and how decision-making happens?
6. After speaking with your neighbors and gauging their interest, reach out to the Building Management Company and tell them you are interested in having this program in your building (please note that it is a DSNY requirement to have management approval). *If you aren't comfortable speaking with your building management company the DSNY will do this for you if you complete the interest form and have others in your building do it as well.*
7. Once you've completed the Brown Bin Form. If you are in an apartment building with 10 or more units, you will need to complete a webinar before curbside composting service begins - register at: on.nyc.gov/DSNYwebinar or find content at makecompost.nyc/webinar

Sample Communications:

Sample Text for Neighbor

Hi Name, I am trying to get our building to sign up for the free brown bin program. It's a free program that we have to opt-in to in Aug. It's a service that would pick up food scraps on a weekly basis from our building. Since I'm a renter I wanted to see if you'd be willing to support my efforts to get this in our building? I would also be happy to chat over a phone call about it. Here is the link to sign up for services: <https://bit.ly/BrownBinSignup>.

Script for Door Knocking

Hi I am Name and I live in Apartment X. Do you have a few minutes to chat?

The city currently has an interest form to opt-in to their Curbside Composting Food Scraps collection program. You might have seen brown bins around a neighborhood. There seems to be a lot of participation in this program in Clinton Hill. *(add your neighborhood here).*

The Curbside Composting program is a free weekly food scrap pick up service offered by the Department of Sanitation. They would provide us with a brown bin with a lid that locks to keep our food scraps in until they are picked up.

This program unfortunately was put on pause when the city had to cut its funding, but it is planning to start collecting again from Community Board districts with the most interest. The more demand there is in your neighborhood the faster the service will be restored in your district.

1. Do you rent your apartment or own?
2. Are you on the Condo board?
 - a. If YES, who else is on the board?
 - b. If NO, do you know who is on the board?
3. Do you separate your food scraps and drop them off at a local compost? No worries if you don't.
4. Would you be interested in learning about food scrap separation?

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is separating food scraps so important?

Organics suitable for composting makeup over a third (34%) of the residential waste stream. I used to think that food scraps could break down properly when they are sent to landfills. I recently learned that when food scraps are thrown away and sent to landfills they break down anaerobically because trash is so jam packed. There is no room for oxygen to get in there, which is what food needs to break down properly. When food ends up in landfills it generates methane which is a really potent greenhouse gas.

The Benefits of the Curbside Composting Program

- It makes our building more attractive to new tenants, as more climate conscious consumers are realizing the impacts of carbon emissions.
- It helps reduce our building's carbon/methane footprint by providing tenants an accessible and convenient way to separate food waste.
- The Curbside Composting Program is not composting in itself. Since this program is a weekly pick up service the food would not have the time to break down.
- It keeps the building waste storage spaces cleaner because organic waste is stored in rigid plastic bins secured with a latch, as opposed to plastic bags that can leak, break, and are penetrable to rodents and pests.

What about pests?

Food waste is typically mixed with garbage and left on the curb in black bags overnight, where it is easily accessed by small mammals (like raccoons, possums, rats, and cats), and bugs. Storing food waste inside rodent-resistant bins like those used for Curbside Composting deters these pests. If you do notice any signs of pests, be sure to do the following:

- Line your brown bin with a clear plastic bag (no black bags). Lining your bin helps to prevent food from freezing to the bin in the winter and keeps odors down in the summer.
- Absorb moisture in your brown bin by including dry materials, such as greasy pizza boxes, food soiled paper, pieces of shredded newspaper, leaves, or baking soda.
- Keep the lid shut, and latch the bin after use.

There is an [online troubleshooting guide](#) should any issues occur and the Department of Sanitation is willing to work with us.

Won't it smell?

Food scraps and yard waste in the brown bin produces no more odor than when it's put into the trash. In fact, frequently placing your food scraps and yard waste into the brown bin can reduce odors in your home. You can also store food scraps in the freezer to control odors until you are ready to deposit them into the brown bin.

There are several other ways to avoid odors, such as:

- Line your brown bin with a clear plastic bag (no black bags). Lining your bin helps to prevent food from freezing to the bin in the winter and keeps odors down in the summer.
- Absorb moisture in your brown bin by including dry materials, such as greasy pizza boxes, food-soiled paper, pieces of shredded newspaper, leaves, or baking soda.
- Keep the lid shut, and latch the bin after use.
- Rinse the kitchen collector frequently. It is also dishwasher safe.

Do I have to participate? Is this service mandatory?

Participating in Curbside Composting is voluntary; there are no fines, but we hope that you will give it a try. If the service does become mandatory, similar to recycling of metal, glass, plastic, and cartons, residents will be given official notification.

Will I have to buy my own bins to participate?

No. DSNY will deliver a free brown, rodent-proof bin with a latching lid to households scheduled for collection.

I used to participate, but have lost my brown bin. Can I get another?

Yes. When you sign up for service, there is a field for requesting bins. DSNY will deliver replacement brown bins and updated information packets when your location is scheduled for collection.

I have never participated before, what will DSNY provide me to get started?

- brown bins
- informational packets to get you set up
- ongoing tips and suggestions for best practices

How many bins will I get?

- Either a 13-gallon bin or 21-gallon bin depending on the number of units in your building and your preference.
- 10+ households and buildings along certain commercial strips, we will ask you questions about your particular set up to determine how many bins and what size you may need.

Can I request additional bins?

DSNY provides additional bins to residents who live in buildings receiving curbside compost service. To request an additional bin visit nyc.gov/curbsidecomposting.

Who does the brown bin belong to?

Each brown bin is specifically assigned to the address it was delivered to and belongs to the residents living there. To ensure the bin isn't taken by your neighbor after collection, write your address in permanent marker on the side or lid of the bin.

Does this affect my normal collection service?

- Curbside Composting is a separate collection service, and will not affect your trash or recycling collections.
- Check your composting collection schedule at: nyc.gov/curbsidecomposting