

# Using Compostables at Potluck

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## What Kind of Compostable Plates

10" plates seem ideal – any less is too small, any bigger unnecessary. I have found the best prices at Amazon and Ebay.

**Note:** To be compostable by a commercial composter (such as [Brooks Contractor](#) where our stuff eventually goes) the plates don't have to be certified as (or labelled as) "compostable". It is necessary, however, that they NOT be plastic coated. Muriel Williman of the Orange County Solid Waste Management Department wrote in an email: "... most plates have a fine poly layer so it is best to find ones that are labeled compostable. My favorite brand is Chinet because not only are the plates not coated and thus compostable, they also use recycled content." (Chinet plates are not labelled "compostable", but they seem to be more expensive than other brands).




Examples of compostable plates that have been ordered:

From Amazon: <a href="#">Earth's Natural Alternative Wheat Straw Fiber, Bagasse (Sugarcane) Tree Free 6" Plate, 50 Pack</a> Sold by: Amazon.com Services, Inc Add-on Item \$3.17
Purchased from eBay: <a href="#">Houseables Compostable Plates, Sugarcane Plate, 500 Count, 10 Inch, Round,</a> Item price        \$54.99 Item number    323419172029 Product Identifiers BRAND Houseables MPN 503006A eBay Product ID (ePID) 2294208410
Also from eBay: <a href="#">10-Inch, Plates 500-Count, Compostable Plates, Natural Bagasse (Sugarcane Round</a> ( 333071417852 ) ITEM PRICE: US \$65.23 Manufacturer: US Green Earth Brand: Green Earth Model No. GE50010INPL503006500BS12018

## Using the Pop-up Trash Container

There is a pop-up trash container in the pantry in the schoolhouse. To use:

1. Remove the collapsed trash container from its bag.
2. Unhook each hook from its loop on the side of the collapsed bag.
3. Once unhooked, the bag pops up.
  - a. Insert a 30-gallon trash bag to line the container. We are using non-compostable bags because Eubanks does not allow any bags to be included with the compost (presumably because too many non-compostable bags would get included).

<p>4. Remove the collapsed trash container from its bag</p> 	<p>5. Unhook each hook from its loop</p> 	<p>6. The trash container pops open. Insert a 30-gallon trash bag.</p> 
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7. **Note:** There is a “COMPOSTABLES ONLY” sign in the bag to clamp to the side of the container.



## Where to Take Compost?

Orange County Waste and Recycling Center at **1514 Eubanks Road**. The compost bins are at the back of the recycling center

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Strictly speaking, the recycling center is for household use and not for organizations, but we have permission from the Outreach Coordinator at Orange County Solid Waste Management to bring our compostables there “as an individual” (best not to say to staff there that you are from an organization) because of our relatively small amount. Please check bag before closing that it contains **only** compostable items. The sign at the recycling center says “No Bags”, so it is probably best to use an ordinary plastic trash bag

and empty its contents into the bin. If you use a certifiably-compostable bag you can show the label on the bag if attendant questions it. Following is their current schedule, which you can find at

<http://www.orangecountync.gov/1149/Waste-Recycling-Centers>

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 AM-6 PM	7 AM-6 PM	CLOSED	7 AM-6 PM	7 AM-6 PM	7 AM-5 PM	1-6 PM



## Why We Compost

**Note:** Following is something that the Hospitality Committee prepared to present to MWAB when we switched from washing plates to using compostables. As it happened, there was no dissent – but just in case the issue ever arises again, here is what was presented:

After months of deliberation, the Hospitality Committee has come to unity on using compostable plates at potluck and to take the plates, paper napkins, and discarded food scraps to the Recycling Center on Eubanks Road. The reasons for this decision are threefold:

- Sanitation
- Maximize fellowship and minimize clean-up
- Compost more and consume less fossil fuel

### Sanitation

Members of the Meeting have expressed concern regarding the sanitation of our hand-washing procedure. While it is one thing to wash a family's dishes by hand, it is quite another to hand wash 50-some plates, glasses, and silverware. The plates in particular have food waste on them, with the result that they sit in a solution of soap, grease, and food particles. And towel drying of dishware is expressly prohibited by the NC Food Code—serving to spread germs around. If we had a commercial dishwasher, the situation would be different. But, our information is that the Early School has decided not to replace its dishwasher due to a cost of some \$1,500.

### Maximize fellowship and minimize clean-up

At each potluck several people have to cut short their fellowship time to begin cleaning up. Moreover, when Hospitality Committee members are working in the kitchen, they are prevented from welcoming and interacting with newcomers.

### **Compost more and consume less fossil fuel**

We can now compost things that we used to throw away, namely, paper napkins, food waste, including meat products, and compostable trash bags. The compost bin behind the schoolhouse can take only vegetable waste—not plates, napkins, or meat waste.

And, by composting, we potentially consume less fossil fuel energy than by hand-washing plates. According to a study at the University of Victoria in Canada, more fossil fuel energy is consumed by hand-washing dishes than is consumed by manufacturing and using single-use disposables. (\* reference at bottom of page). While the results of this study might be questioned, there seems to be general agreement that hand washing uses more fossil fuel than an energy-efficient electric dishwasher. And, because we are using compostable plates we are not adding to the landfills as we would with disposable (but not compostable) paper plates.

### **Financial cost**

We are still investigating the best source for compostable plates, but it appears that suitable plates can be obtained for around 10 cents per plate. Of course, the more people who bring their plates and utensils to potluck, the more we can avoid both hand washing and using compostables, so we continue to encourage people to bring their own.

\*Martin B. Hocking, “Reusable and disposable cups: An energy-based evaluation” Environmental Management 18(6):889-899 November 1994

“In Canada or the United States, over 500 or more use cycles, washable cups are found to have about the same or slightly more energy consumption as moulded polystyrene foam cups used once and then discarded. The wash energy alone is as much or more than that required to make a polystyrene foam cup and more than half that required to make a paper cup. Paper cups used once and discarded are found to consume less fossil fuel energy per use than any of the other cup types examined.”