



Compost Ordinance Overview and FAQ Sheet

[*You can read the full ordinance here.*](#)

In 2015, the city of Chicago passed amendments to Chicago's compost ordinance that now allows community gardens and urban farms to accept and compost food scraps and other organic waste generated off-site.

What does this mean for community gardeners?

Under the new rules, community gardens will be able to accept (if they wish) raw, unprocessed food scraps and eggshells, in addition to landscape waste, from off-site noncommercial entities. Previously, they could only compost on-site materials. If the garden wishes to accept off-site food scraps and eggshells, they will have to register (for free) annually with the city. Gardens who accept off-site waste are considered Tier 2 garden composting operations. There are a few specific requirements for Tier 2 garden composting operations, including:

- Storing waste in containers at the end of the day if it is not immediately incorporated into the composting system.
- Registration of the garden by April 1 each year at CUAMP website (www.cuamp.org)
- Record-keeping of the inputs into the compost pile as well as turning and other upkeep.
- Following best practices to minimize odor and pests.
- Composting operation can be no larger than 10 cubic yards (or 25 cubic yards with permission of Streets and Sanitation).

What does this mean for urban farmers?

Urban farmers will also be able to register for free and follow the same requirements as above, but can additionally apply for a permit that allows them to conduct larger, more robust operations.

Urban farm accessory composting operation permits have the following requirements:

- Must get a permit from the city (\$300/3 years).
- Can take any type of organic waste as the permit allows.
- Operation can be no larger than 2% of the property.
- No tipping fee is allowed. (A hauler can be paid to pick up material, but a farm cannot be paid to accept material.)
- Can sell finished compost, but must comply with all applicable performance standards and testing procedures for end-product compost produced by compost facilities.
- There is a 150 foot setback from residential properties required and also a record-keeping requirement.

What does this mean for residents of Chicago who want to compost their food scraps?

Community members who want to take their food scraps and other organic waste to be composted may have new options. Nearby community gardens and farms may, but not necessarily, allow neighbors to bring their food scraps and other organic waste to their sites to be composted.

It is important to note, however, that you cannot take this material to every growing site in Chicago. The garden site must be registered or permitted to accept off-site materials. Check with the garden site first if it is

okay for you to drop off your waste. If so, inquire about an appropriate time and place to drop off the waste. You will also want to ask about their recordkeeping requirements.

The ordinance created two tiers of Garden Composting Operations (Tier 1 and Tier 2 Garden Composting Operation) and an Urban Farm Accessory Composting Operation.

TIER 1 GARDEN COMPOSTING OPERATION

A composting operation that composts only landscape waste, whether or not generated on-site.

What is landscape waste?

“Landscape waste” means grass or shrubbery cuttings, leaves, tree limbs and other materials accumulated as a result of the care of lawns, shrubbery, vines and trees, and includes any discarded fruits, vegetables and other vegetative material or crop residue generated in the care of a garden (or on-site at garden).

Landscape waste does not include food scraps.

Can I sell my finished compost or charge a fee for receiving off-site landscape waste?

No. The composting operation cannot be engaged in commercial activities related to composting, the acceptance of landscape waste or commercial landscaping.

Can the finished composted be used at another garden?

No. All generated compost must be used on-site.

How large can the compost operation be at a Tier 1 garden?

The composting operation cannot be larger than a total of 10 cubic yards of landscape waste, composting material and end product compost on-site at any one time, unless express written authorization has been issued by the commissioner of streets and sanitation allowing a greater volume, but cannot exceed 25 cubic yards.

How do I receive written authorization from the commissioner of streets and sanitation to allow a greater volume of compost?

Send a letter to the Commissioner of Streets and Sanitation. In the letter, cite the compost ordinance and explain the request to increase the volume of compost.

Streets & Sanitation phone: 312.744.4611

Address: 121 N. LaSalle Street, Room 1107, Chicago, IL 60602

Do I have to register this compost operation with the city or keep records?

No. Tier 1 gardens require no registration, permit, or recordkeeping with the city.

Will my operation be inspected by the city? What is the warning and ticketing process?

Composting operations may be inspected by personnel from the Department of Streets and Sanitation or the Department of Public Health. An inspection will occur if the City receives a 311 complaint about an operation. In addition, environmental inspectors may conduct random inspections to ensure the operations are not causing a public nuisance. Compost registration will not automatically trigger an inspection. It is the City's goal to encourage compliance and facilitate appropriate composting operations. Therefore, in most cases, the City will issue a warning before issuing a ticket. If an operator does receive a ticket, then the ticket will include instructions about when and where to go to resolve the ticket. The fine range is \$300 - \$600.

TIER 2 GARDEN COMPOSTING OPERATION

This composting operation composts landscape waste and limited organic waste. The limited organic waste cannot exceed 10% of the total material in the process of being composted on-site at any one time.

What is limited organic waste?

Limited organic waste is defined as organic waste, other than landscape waste, which does not include: fish; fish products; poultry; poultry products; meat; meat products; eggs (excluding egg shells); cheese, butter or other dairy products; fat; grease; oil or oily food; cat, dog, or other animal excreta; animal feed losses or animal bedding; colored or glossy paper; sawdust from pressure-treated plywood or lumber; diseased or insect-infested houseplants or soil; or biodegradable or compostable plastic.

Does limited organic waste mean food scraps?

Yes.

What do I do when I receive food scraps at my garden?

All food scrap must be processed into the composting operation or be contained in-vessel by the end of the day, whether it was generated on-site or received from an off-site source (e.g. neighbor). Other limited organic waste must be processed into the composting operation or be contained in a properly maintained covered steel or rigid plastic container by the end of the day, whether it was generated on-site or received from an off-site source (e.g. neighbor).

Can I sell my finished compost or charge a fee for receiving off-site compost?

No. This composting operation cannot be engaged in commercial activities related to composting, the acceptance of limited organic waste or landscape waste, or commercial landscaping.

Can the finished compost be used at another garden?

All generated compost must be used on-site.

How large can the compost operation be at my garden?

The composting operation cannot be larger than a total of 10 cubic yards of landscape waste, limited organic waste, composting material and end product compost on-site at any one time, unless express written

authorization has been issued by the commissioner of streets and sanitation allowing a greater volume, but cannot exceed 25 cubic yards.

How do I receive written authorization from the commissioner of streets and sanitation to allow a greater volume of compost?

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Do I have to register this compost operation with the city?

Yes. A Tier 2 garden composting operation requires online registration through the CUAMP website by April 1st of every year. No permits are required for Tier 2 gardens.

Do I have to keep records for receiving off-site waste to be composted?

Yes. Tier 2 gardens are required to keep records of the off-site waste received. The recordkeeping form can be found on the CUAMP website (www.cuamp.org).

The records must be maintained at the garden location and must be made available for inspection upon request by any City of Chicago official.

Do the records have to be kept on paper? Or can I keep electronic copies?

The records can either be kept on paper or electronically, as long as you can make the records available to city officials, if requested. Both a print and electronic copy of the records are available on CUAMP's website (www.cuamp.org).

Will my operation be inspected by the city? What is the warning and ticketing process?

Composting operations may be inspected by personnel from the Department of Streets and Sanitation or the Department of Public Health. An inspection will occur if the City receives a 311 complaint about an operation. In addition, environmental inspectors may conduct random inspections to ensure the operations are not causing a public nuisance. Compost registration will not automatically trigger an inspection. It is the City's goal to encourage compliance and facilitate appropriate composting operations. Therefore, in most cases, the City will issue a warning before issuing a ticket. If an operator does receive a ticket, then the ticket will include instructions about when and where to go to resolve the ticket. The fine range is \$300 - \$600.

URBAN FARM ACCESSORY COMPOSTING OPERATION

The ordinance creates an Urban Farm Accessory Composting Operation permit that allows for more robust composting operations and a wider range of ingredients.

What ingredients are allowed for Urban Farm Accessory Composting Operations:

Any type of organic waste, including food waste scrap, landscape waste, livestock waste, uncontaminated wood waste or other non-hazardous carbonaceous waste that is collected and processed separately from the rest of the municipal waste stream.

Livestock waste includes excreta from animals used for food, fiber or labor; associated feed losses; and bedding.

All waste must be processed or contained in a covered steel or rigid plastic container by the end of the day, whether generated on-site or off-site.

How large can my composting operation be on my urban farm?

The composting operation size is limited to 2% of farm site's acreage.

The compost operation be located at least 150 feet from all boundaries or the farthest distance from all boundaries, whichever is greater. This requirement does not apply to an operation conducted within a completely enclosed building.

Can I sell the compost generated on my farm site?

Yes. You may sell compost produced but may not charge for acceptance of materials/waste received.

Do I need a permit for my Urban Farm Accessory Composting Operation?

Yes. You need to obtain a 3-year permit fee for \$300 with a capacity of less than 4,000 tons per year.

Do I need to keep records for my Urban Farm Accessory Composting Operation?

Yes. Any person engaged in an urban farm accessory composting operation shall, in a form prescribed by the commissioner, maintain records for all organic waste and livestock waste received from an off-site source. These records must be made available for inspection by city officials, when requested.

Records also must be kept for the amount of compost sold by the facility.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions regarding registration from Tier 2 garden composting operations, please send an email to gardencomposting@cityofchicago.org.

For other questions, please email Advocates for Urban Agriculture at info@auachicago.org.