

# ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

## Green Tip: Compostable vs. Biodegradable

Have you noticed the words *compostable* or *biodegradable* popping up all over the place? It can be confusing to know the difference, so we've provided some information comparing the two in an effort to help you make informed decisions about how you handle waste.

**Compostable** means that natural, organic substances can be turned into nutrient rich soil.

**Biodegradable** means that an item will chemically break down into smaller and smaller parts.

*In order for items to break down, both compostable and biodegradable materials need the right environment (for starters: oxygen and moisture).*

### Which is better?

Natural substance breakdown (compostable) is always better for the environment. Contrary to popular belief, biodegradable does not mean that we can throw something away and *poof!* it will disappear. In fact, some biodegradable materials still contain toxins which are bad for the environment. Because our landfills are so compacted, biodegradable (or compostable) materials cannot breakdown due to a lack of oxygen and moisture which creates methane gas; a large contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.



### So what can you do?

1. Strive to keep waste out of the landfill (This means educating yourself on items you purchase, and knowing where they should go post-use).
2. Try the Waste Stream Challenge! According to North Bay Corporation, about 35% of residential garbage in Sonoma County is food waste. For one week (in your home or business) put your food waste into the green yard bin and see how much you can keep out of the landfill. For a list of accepted items go to: [http://www.recyclenow.org/Compost\\_your\\_veggies.pdf](http://www.recyclenow.org/Compost_your_veggies.pdf)
3. Want to do more? Try composting at home. Common compostable items like coffee grounds, egg shells, fruits, vegetables, and leaves are easy to start with. For more information go to: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserves/rrr/composting/index.htm>

"To be considered green or sustainable, products should be designed to be reused, recycled, or composted."  
<http://tinyurl.com/yb8dcpd>

#### Helpful links:

[www.bpiworld.org](http://www.bpiworld.org) (Biodegradable Products Institute)  
[www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org) (American Statistics on Testing Materials)  
[www.stoptrashingthecclimateorg](http://www.stoptrashingthecclimateorg)  
[www.cool2012.com](http://www.cool2012.com)  
[www.compostingcouncil.org](http://www.compostingcouncil.org)

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