

# ZGreen Event Resources

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## Compostable vs. Recyclable Plastics

Compostable plastics are a great alternative to the traditional items of the past, but both regular plastics and compostable plastics require energy, water and other natural resources. In addition, compostable plastics tend to cost more, so it is important that you weigh the costs and benefits to determine which type of plastic will work better for your event.

### **Compostable:**

Any item that will break down in a commercial composting facility. Must be labeled as compostable with a #7. Note: not all #7 plastics are compostable. Look for the 'compostable' label.

- Cups, plates, bowls typically made from corn, sugarcane or potatoes
- Silverware typically made from corn, sugarcane or potatoes
- Compostable plastic bags made from corn, sugarcane or potatoes

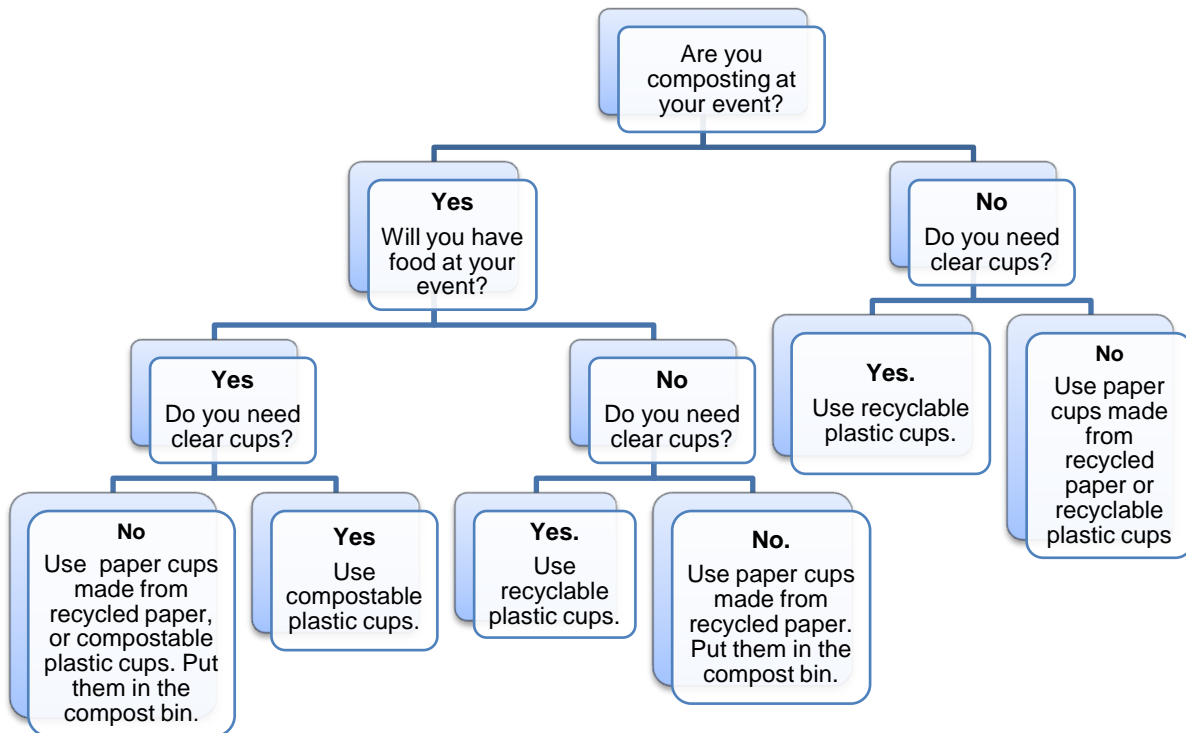
### **Recyclable:**

Glass, plastic and aluminum. Traditional plastic cups labeled #1 through #6. These plastics get recycled in the comingled bin. Plastic bags are only recyclable at the Rio Grande Recycling Center.

### **Plastic vs. Biodegradable Plastic: the Breakdown**

- Regular plastics will never fully break down. They will remain forever in the landfill, taking up space.
- If regular plastics end up in rivers or other natural systems, they still won't degrade.
- Compostable plastics will break down and can be turned into useable soil, but only in the right conditions.
  - o Compostable plastic must first be collected in a separate container and taken to a commercial compost facility where the temperature is above 140 degrees Fahrenheit with high humidity.
  - o Compostable plastics can only be made into useable soil if it is mixed with other compostable items. That is why we recommend that events mix compostable cups with food waste to ensure that event waste is sent to the landfill ready for successful composting.
  - o If compostable plastics aren't sent to a commercial facility, they go to the landfill, where they take years to break down. The moisture levels in the Pitkin County landfill are kept extremely low, making the breakdown process slow and essentially making compostable plastics a pointless investment.

The chart below can help you decide if compostable plastic cups are right for your event.



**If you choose recyclable plastic cups (#1 through #6), make sure they get recycled. They should go in the comingled bin with the glass bottles and aluminum cans.**

**If you choose compostable plastic cups (#7), offer composting at your event and make sure these cups get composted at the Pitkin County Landfill composting site. These cups are not recyclable and can easily contaminate your recycling.**

**Plates:** Use paper plates made from post-consumer recycled paper. If paper is not strong enough, use plates made from compostable materials such as sugarcane, potato, or corn.

**Napkins:** Use paper napkins made from post-consumer recycled paper.

**Cutlery:** Use cutlery made from compostable materials like sugarcane, potato, or corn. Compostable cutlery is rated according to the highest temperature it can withstand. Most compostable flatware is rated up to 200 degrees.