Frequently Asked Questions:
Compostable Bags

Introduction

Over 100 million plastic shopping bags will be used this year in the US, and we are running out of places to put them. As consumers and retailers develop ways to recycle and reuse these bags good alternatives are needed. One promising alternative is to offer shopping bags that can be repurposed and reused as compostable kitchen food waste bags. These bags are suitable as drop-in replacements for traditional polyethylene or polypropylene grocery bags. Furthermore, they can then be reused to collect kitchen food scraps for curbside compost collection.

What are compostable bags?

In order to be labeled as “compostable,” a bag must meet established composting standards for completely breaking down in an industrial composting facility within a fixed period of time. Compostable bags must be made from raw materials that are themselves compostable, non-toxic and won’t accumulate in the environment. The most important North American standards for compostable bags are ASTM D6400 and BNQ9011911. In Europe this standard is EN13432 and broadly the international standard is ISO17088. Metabolix’s biopolymers and film products have been certified by independent agencies to meet D6400 and EN13432 requirements for industrial composting, making them excellent choices for compostable bags. For a full list of certifications, visit our website.

Why use compostable bags?

Compostable bags offer consumers and food suppliers the means to package food scraps and other organic household waste from lawns and gardens and to send it to compost facilities. Sending this waste to composters keeps it from going to landfills which are themselves becoming scarce, and enables the waste to be recycled by generating compost that can be reapplied in home gardens. Compostable bags also open up the opportunity for recycling and reusing everyday shopping bags by repurposing them to collect food scraps or for composting. Recycling shopping bags either through normal plastics recyclers or in combination with composting home food scraps also helps reduce the total number of plastic bags that wind up as litter polluting our waters and trees.

How are compostable bags disposed?

Compostable bags can be disposed at municipal and industrial compost facilities, where they will biodegrade along with the food scraps they contain from your kitchen into usable compost soil that can be reapplied on home gardens. Properly managed industrial compost facilities are able to ensure safety and operate under optimal composting conditions. Under these proper operating conditions, Metabolix’s compostable bags and the food waste they contain will completely disintegrate within six weeks. Curbside pickup or central recycle collection points that haul the waste to the composters are important in communities that want to enable composting to keep these waste streams out of landfills. To find the closest compost facility in your area, please visit your local city or town website, town clerk, or visit: http://www.findacomposter.com/index.php.

How do I know if a bag meets municipal standards for composting?

Compostable bags meet most municipal requirements for composting if they are shown to meet the US ASTM D6400, or European EN13432 industrial standards for composting. Look for a label or certification printed on the bag indicating that the bags meet one of these composting standards.
How does the cost of compostable bags compare to regular poly-based bags?

While the material cost of compostable bags is still higher than bags made from traditional polyethylene, these costs continue to come down as the industry technology matures. Some municipalities are charging a fee for traditional polyethylene shopping bags to reflect the associated costs for landfilling and litter control and to encourage recycling alternatives such as composting and reprocessing through plastics recyclers.

How does the durability/performance of compostable bags compare to polyethylene (poly) bags?

Most compostable bags feature similar durability and performance characteristics when compared to non-compostable polyethylene-based bags. Bags made with Metabolix’s M•vera B5008 resin have a good balance of properties including flexibility, load bearing strength, and tear and puncture resistance. For information on how Metabolix compostable bags perform, please refer to our website.

What are the storage requirements for compostable bags?

Typically, compostable bags should be stored in a cool, dry area, out of direct sunlight or direct heat, and in temperatures less than 80°F (26°C).

Does Metabolix make compostable bags?

Metabolix manufactures the polymer products for use in making compostable bags. Metabolix’s M•vera B5008 is a certified compostable film grade for use in making compostable food waste bags and shopping bags. Metabolix sells these film products to bag manufacturers who sell bags wholesale to municipalities or to retail vendors.

What are “bag bans”?

Many cities and municipalities are evaluating enacting legislation to ban the use of polyethylene (Poly) shopping bags generally as a means of preventing litter when these bags inadvertently get loose in the environment and to encourage recycle or reuse mechanisms to deal with the problem. Several communities have already enacted such legislation. Please see the following link for a summary of bag bans enacted around the world. With an increasing number of plastic bag bans coming into effect, the need for alternative solutions is growing. Please consider compostable shopping bags in your area as an effective alternative and use of compostable bags generally to enable disposal of kitchen food waste at composters rather than landfills.

Where can I find out about local “plastic bag ban” legislation?

Your city should list on their website any existing or forthcoming “plastic bag ban” developments. Be sure to check also whether your city is developing composting collection systems and which bags will be accepted by their haulers.

Where can I get Metabolix’s compostable bags?

Please visit our website to learn more about the Metabolix story and the advantages our resins bring to the compostable bag market. You will also find links to where you can purchase Metabolix’s compostable bags. If you are a bag manufacturer, you can inquire about purchasing our film products for making your own bags. If you have any further questions, please call us at (617) 583-1700.