

ZERO WASTE EVENT GUIDE



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA
Office of Sustainability

STEP-BY-STEP CHECKLIST

Event planning is a big task! We're here to help.

What is a Zero Waste Event?

Events reflect the culture of your organization. A Zero Waste Event conveys a commitment to sustainability while striving to ***divert at least 90% of waste materials*** from the landfill. This guide provides tips to plan, purchase, and properly dispose of materials to help you and your guests have the best experience possible.

BEFORE THE EVENT

PLANNING AND COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Communicate your Zero Waste goals with everyone involved in planning your event - from your internal planning team members to your caterer and any other vendors.

Tip: Evaluate each purchasing decision by asking “can this be reused, composted, or recycled?” Visit our [interactive waste reduction website](#) to find out. If the answer is no, you don't need it at your Zero Waste Event.

CATERING AND SUPPLIES

- ☐ Provide compostable food services wares for your guests.

Tip 1: Ask your caterer to provide compostable service wares; here's an [email template](#). You can also use this [catering list](#) to discover Zero Waste-friendly caterers in Athens.

Tip 2: If you plan to buy your own compostable wares, here's a recommended [compostable products list](#). Only purchase BPI-certified products; “Eco-friendly” and “biodegradable” do NOT mean compostable! In this case, remind your caterer not to bring plastic utensils / wares.

Tip 3: Don't forget the little things! Single-serving condiment packets, creamers, dressings, etc. will need to be landfilled. Consider using family-sized or reusable containers for these items.

SWAG AND DECOR

- ☐ Avoid specific or time-bound branding.

E.g. “Sustainable UGA Semester in Review” versus “Spring 2025 Sustainable UGA Semester in Review”.

- ☐ Make swag items more sustainable.

Tip 1: Allow guests to opt-in or opt-out of swag / giveaways to reduce unnecessary waste.

Tip 2: Think quality over quantity! Raffle long-lasting, reusable gifts like thermoses or tote bags, rather than cheap disposable items like wristbands, pens, or stress balls.

- ☐ Ditch disposable decorations.

Tip 1: Replace disposable plastic table cloths with fabric ones that will last year after year. Darker colors hide stains and custom tablecloths showcase your organization’s brand!

Tip 2: Consider decorating tables with glass jars and flowers or potted plants to elevate your event. Afterwards, these items can be used as giveaways or saved for next time.

WASTE BINS AND SIGNS

PLANNING INDOOR EVENTS

- ☐ Provide compost bins - in addition to recycling and landfill bins - at your indoor event.

Tip 1: For the simplest logistics, host your event in a campus building that already offers compost service.

Tip 2: For a free-of-charge, DIY approach to compost collection, complete a [Compost Bin Request Form](#) to coordinate pickup and return of compost bin(s) at the [Office of Sustainability](#).

- ☐ Provide signs to help your guests put waste in the right place.

Tip: You can use these [pre-made signs](#) or create custom signs for your event with these [above-the-bin sign templates](#) or these [table-top sign templates](#).

PLANNING OUTDOOR EVENTS

- ☐ Complete an “[Event Support Request](#)” to hire Facilities Management Division (FMD) to deliver and retrieve compost, recycling, and landfill bins for guests to use at your event.

Tip: The recommended quantity of bins is 1 Waste Station per every 50 guests.

- ☐ If you hire FMD for your outdoor event, general waste signage will be provided. We recommend you also create customized table-top signs tailored to your event by using these [table-top sign templates](#).

DURING THE EVENT

COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Remind event staff which materials belong in each of the three waste bins and why it's important.
- ☐ Make a brief announcement to all attendees about your waste reduction efforts. Reference the instructional signs and explain why it's important.

Example Why Statement: "UGA is committed to waste reduction. By composting at this event, we are sending less waste to the landfill and helping to grow more food. Help us put waste in the right place by following the instructional signs."

WASTE BINS AND SIGNS

- ☐ Make sure waste bins are co-located with landfill, recycling, and compost all directly adjacent to each other. This will reduce contamination and make waste disposal simpler for your guests.
- ☐ Place waste reduction signs on food and beverage serving tables.
- ☐ For indoor events, place corresponding signs above each waste bin whenever possible.

VOLUNTEERS

- ☐ Proper waste disposal can be confusing! If possible, recruit volunteers to stand next to each set of waste bins and help attendees properly sort their waste.



Indoor Event Bins



Outdoor Event Bins

AFTER THE EVENT

WASTE DISPOSAL

- ☐ Bring extra containers for leftover food.

Tip: Event staff or students are usually happy to go home with an extra meal!

- ☐ If you borrowed indoor compost bins from the Office of Sustainability, dispose the compostable material at an [ACC Public Compost Drop-off Site](#) (accessible 24/7) and return the compost bin(s) to the [Office of Sustainability](#) during business hours (M-F, 8am-5pm).

Tip: The closest on-campus drop-off point is likely behind MLC. Other campus drop-off sites can be found at UGA Graduate & Family Housing, Health Sciences Campus, and UGArden.

- ☐ If you submitted a [FMD Event Support Work Request](#) for your outdoor event, FMD Waste Reduction Services will take it from here!

- ☐ Save items to reuse next year.

Tip: Items without time-specific branding can last year after year - and save you money!

- ☐ Donate leftover swag / decorations to [UGA Swap Shop](#) or a local thrift store like [Project Safe](#).



HELPFUL RESOURCES

LISTS AND LINKS

- [Compostable Products List](#)
- [Sustainable Catering List](#)
- [Event Catering Email Template](#)
- [Compost Bin Request Form](#)
- [Event Support Work Request Form](#)
- [Sign Templates](#)
- [Office of Sustainability / Chicopee Map](#)
- [Interactive Waste Reduction Webpage](#)
- Contact: sustain@uga.edu | (706) 542-1301



Sample Event Sign

REMINDERS

- Compostable items are best for events! Items with food residue can't be easily recycled, but compostable wares can be tossed into the compost bin along with any leftover food. This simplifies disposal for your guests!
- Support local vendors when possible.
- Remember: Reduce, then Reuse, then Recycle (and Compost), in that order!
 - Eliminate unnecessary giveaways - think quality over quantity - and request RSVPs to right-size your order.
- Reusable is even better than compostable! The ACC Solid Waste Department offers [Zero Waste Kits](#) with reusable wares (free of charge!) if you have the ability to wash them before returning the kits.
- Bring Tupperware to send any leftover food home with volunteers or to take back to your office.
- Want to calculate your event's diversion rate? Contact sustain@uga.edu to borrow a scale and receive guidance.
- Take pictures and promote your sustainability efforts!

INTRO TO WASTE STREAMS



COMPOST

- Anything *once alive* can be composted!
- Common event items: food, napkins, coffee grounds, & BPI-Certified products.
- Food scraps become a nutrient-rich soil additive.
- Items in compost bins go to the [ACC Commercial Compost Facility](#).
- *NO regular plastics* in compost bins!



RECYCLING

- All recyclables must be *empty and clean*!
- Food residue is hard to avoid at events, so try to use compostable wares instead.
- Recycling creates jobs in Georgia & reduces natural resource stress.
- Learn more [here](#) about what *can and can't* be recycled at UGA and in Athens!



LANDFILL

- Items we throw away *never go away*!
- Landfill space is limited, so the less we send to the landfill, the better.
- Purchasing event materials that can be readily composted or recycled limits landfill waste.

