

COMPOSTABLE BAG FACTS



Just when did bagging dog poop start?

In the mid-nineteen hundreds pet ownership grew rapidly, and so did the amount of dog poo on sidewalks and streets. The time came for dog owners to take responsibility in the dog poo scooping department.



It is over 50 years since the first poop scoop law was passed in a small suburban town in Nutley, New Jersey (1971), which would legally enforce walkers to pick up dog poop. It took several more years before poop scoop laws applied across many other US cities, starting with New York in 1978. Many other countries were doing similar. For example, in Australia in the late 1970's dog poo was considered litter with fines for leaving it in public areas, in the UK their Dog Fouling of land Act was introduced in 1996 and in Scotland in 2003.

LITTERING IS ILLEGAL

Leaving dog poo in public areas such as streets, parks and on beaches can all incur a fine. Under the **Litter Act 1979** you can be fined \$200 for not cleaning up after your pet.

Bagged, binned and forgotten!

From the early 1970' we moved the issue of smelly offensive dog poop from the pavements to piles of methane producing plastic bagged poop in landfill.

Sealed in bags, dog poop is in landfill for the long haul. Even compostable bags in landfill don't get the oxygen they need to break down any time soon. In fact, it is likely to be there for generations to come!

The introduction of compostable bags

Pick-up bags made from plant-based materials (such as cornstarch, flax or bamboo), has opened the doors to collect and bag dog poo and allow it to be re-purposed. Under the right conditions, the bags and poop break down to become organic matter.



Compostable bags do need to be used in the right manner in order to improve environmental outcomes from bagging pet waste in them. They do not break down for many years in landfill without oxygen, bacteria and moisture.

If your community waste management system offers commercial composting services for dog waste, using certified compostable pick-up bags is essential.

Certified compostable pick-up bag

Certification verifies a product's claims of how it biodegrades, and composts based on a standard. There are two types, industrial and home compost standards. Different countries have different symbols that help make this clear.

Industry compost standard



Home compost standard



AS 5810
ABAX 9999



COMPOSTABLE



COMPOSTABLE BAG FACTS



More about the standard

In Australia and New Zealand there are two standards that determine and regulate what can be labelled as 'compostable': industry/commercial compostable AS4736 and home compostable AS5810. The standard means - a minimum of 90% biodegradation, no toxic effect to compost, plants and earthworms and materials should contain more than 50% organic material.



Australia's symbols for the two standards



The Australian the home compost standard uses lower temperatures in test environments, and a longer test duration.

The standard includes tests to measure:

- biodegradability
- disintegration during biological treatment
- effect on the biological treatment process and
- effect on the quality of the resulting home compost.

Many Australian state, territory, and local governments have already banned certain problematic, unnecessary and single-use plastics and plastic packaging. Under the National Waste Policy Action Plan in Australia (NWPAP), the Australian Government is working with industry and state and territory governments to phase out problematic single-use plastics helping deliver on one of the five action plan targets.



European standard

Standards for industrial composting and anaerobic digestion

The European standard **EN 13432** "Requirements for packaging recoverable through composting and biodegradation" requires at least 90% disintegration after twelve weeks, 90% biodegradation⁵ (CO₂ evolution) in six months, and includes tests on ecotoxicity and heavy metal content. It is the standard for biodegradable packaging designed for treatment in industrial composting facilities and anaerobic digestion.

North America

There is one single compostable certification that is regulated by the Bioplastics Institute (BPI). The BPI Certification Mark has been the defining symbol of compostability for audiences across the value chain for over 20 years. The BPI Certification program is a third-party verification of ASTM standards for compostable products in North America, and the starting point for every company wishing to make composability claims on products and packaging.



COMPOSTABLE BAG FACTS



Biodegradable, oxobiodegradable pick-up bags

These bags that are not designated "compostable" are made of plastic film with an added degradant that helps them break apart if exposed to the elements. As with compostable bags, the organic components of these bags do not fully decompose when hermetically sealed in a landfill. If the bags are allowed to break down in nature, the plastic fragments will stay intact in the soil, water and air.

Helping make bag issues clearer

In 2007, the State of California essentially made the term "biodegradable bags" illegal.

California law (2011) prohibits the sale of a plastic bag or plastic food or beverage container that is labeled as "biodegradable," "degradable," "decomposable," or as otherwise specified, eliminating dog waste pick-up bag marketing fraud.



The state also requires compostable bag suppliers to explain on their packaging that the bags should be streamed to a commercial composting facility for proper recycling.

Really...do you even need a flexible bag?

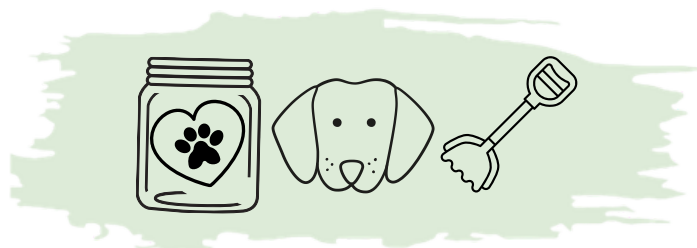
The marketplace is catching on to pet owners' aversion to plastic and confusion over which bioplastic bag is best. New products featuring biodegradable paper sheets and pick-up bags are available at pet supply outlets worldwide.

The Marjorie P. Johnson State Park in New York City supplies dog park visitors with inexpensive paper bags and scoops to pick up pet poop. The park then collects the waste and composts it to enrich the soil for park landscapes. Their successful program has operated since 2016.



Another good choice: re-usable containers

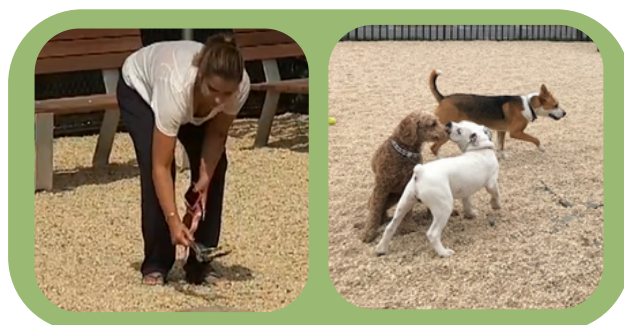
Take a page from the hikers' guide. When eco-savvy trekkers take their dogs on open trails, they put Scout's poo into a receptacle and pack it out. Any air-tight rigid container will work for outdoor walks. With a little planning, you can put together a system that works for you, your dogs and your disposal method. The container can be hosed out and reused.



Train your dog to "go" before you go

Get your dog into the routine of getting down to business in your yard or in the early stages of a walk. That way you can enjoy the adventure with your best friend instead of watching out for a spontaneous dump. Keeping poo in your yard makes collection for do-it-yourself recycling systems easier.

Encourage a bit of exercise at trail heads before heading out for a hike. Your dog will be likely to leave poo near a public bin, making pick up and disposal more efficient. If your park offers compostable bags and designated dog poo bins, so much the better!



Visitor using a scoop at MPJ Dog Park, New York

COMPOSTABLE BAG FACTS



All greened up with no place to go

If your community does not offer community pet waste composting services, certified compostable or otherwise advertised "biodegradable bags" get tossed in the trash.

You may ask, "If compostable bags aren't part of a community recycling process that streams organic material to a composting facility, what's the point of using them?"

Here are three of them:

- 1) **Supply and demand.** Be a part of driving down the cost of compostable bags. When more of these bags are purchased, the lower the price will be in the future.
- 2) **Plastic bag bans.** Shopping bags in sizes handy for dog poop pick up will be scarce as more communities take them out of circulation. The compostable bag habit is a good one to cultivate.
- 3) **Get on the frontline.** Compostable film is the wave of the future. Model good environmental behavior for others and be prepared for a plastic-free future.



Do-it-yourself pet waste composting

Promotions often lead buyers to believe that compostable bags can be used for yard composting or various backyard doggie in-ground systems. But the bags don't break down easily if they're not commercially composted.

Because they don't break down, compostable bags fail to expose the waste inside to the microbes that break them down. However, bags that are home compostable-certified – EN13432 – are emerging in the world marketplace. Look for that certification when composting.

Magical thinking

Some pet owners leave "compostable" or "biodegradable" bags filled with dog waste on the ground or cover them with dirt hoping that they will quickly degrade.

One dog owner said (true story), *"These bags are great! I leave them in the field and when I come back they're gone."* Nature does not embrace the bags. Someone picks them up or they simply blow away.



Which bag? Let the end process decide

Large-scale commercial composting requires certified compostable bags. Large-scale biodigestion systems have their own regulations for bag usage (or non usage). Small-scale pet waste composting and backyard in-ground systems are best done using scoopers for pick up.

If your wastewater treatment facility allows dog waste flushing, avoid clogging plumbing. Never flush waste-filled bags and limit the poop quantity in a single flush.

Education is the key for public spaces



Signs and media posts are effective in getting the message across about compostable bags. But sometimes person-to-person contact - like this Boulder program kick-off - works best!