



SUSTAINABILITY STARTS WITH HOU

HOUSTON HOSPITALITY
SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT

OCTOBER 2025

EDITION 1

THE BAYOU CITY IS READY TO WELCOME THE WORLD.

As we prepare to host visitors from around the globe, local hospitality leaders have a unique opportunity to shine – not just with service, but with sustainability.

Whether you run a hotel, restaurant, catering company, coffee shop, or sports bar, this guide is packed with practical ways to reduce waste, improve efficiency, and build a stronger, more resilient business. While the global spotlight in 2026 may be the spark these are practices designed to last.

Environmental sustainability in hospitality focuses on minimizing environmental impact while maximizing operational efficiency and cost savings.

THE TOOLKIT HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO HELP YOU:

- Understand how sustainable practices can benefit your business & community and potentially reduce costs.
- Evaluate your current operations and identify opportunities to improve resource use, environmental stewardship, and waste management.

- Engage with suppliers, service providers, and customers.
- Collect and analyze data to monitor performance, measure successes, and communicate results effectively.
- Involve and train staff to integrate sustainability into daily operations.

This guide is structured to offer low, medium, and high-effort actions, allowing you to choose initiatives that work best for your business. “High effort” doesn’t always mean harder; every business is different, and it’s important to evaluate the actions that make the most sense for your business. Toolkit sections that are specific to hotels are marked in green.

Whether you’re making small adjustments or implementing comprehensive sustainability programs, this toolkit will help you navigate practical solutions and local resources specific to Houston. Before making changes, we recommend that businesses review lease agreements, consult legal and financial professionals, and explore available grants, incentives, or partnerships to help offset costs.

We encourage you to **take action today** - wherever you are currently. Thank you for being part of **Houston’s journey toward a more sustainable hospitality industry**. Let’s work together to create a thriving, resilient future for our businesses, our communities, and our planet.

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**IMPACT
HOUSTON 26**

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1 WHY SUSTAINABILITY



WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS TO YOUR BUSINESS

Sustainability in hospitality means reducing environmental impact while improving operational efficiency and cost savings. The hospitality industry relies heavily on energy, water, food, and materials, creating a significant footprint.

BENEFITS OF ADOPTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES:

RESILIENCE & RISK MANAGEMENT ✓

Anticipate and adapt to changing regulations, reduce dependency on natural resources, and build resilience to supply chain disruptions.

COST SAVINGS & EFFICIENCY ✓

Reduce operating expenses through lower utility bills for energy and water consumption, material management and waste reduction, reduced shipping costs, and improved efficiency.

COMMUNITY IMPACT ✓

Strengthen local supply chains, help create local jobs, and improve community health and well-being.

MARKET DIFFERENTIATION ✓

Stand out with sustainability certifications, differentiate your community commitment from competitors, and attract customers who care about environmental issues.

IMPROVE REPUTATION & CUSTOMER LOYALTY¹ ✓

Consumers increasingly prefer businesses that prioritize sustainability; certifications and sustainable initiatives serve as marketing differentiators; and responsible business practices build trust, brand loyalty, and community support. 83% of global travelers think sustainable travel is important.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT² ✓

Improve employee morale and reduce turnover: 71% of workers say environmentally responsible companies are more attractive employers; 83% of Millennial talent say they would be more loyal to a company that makes an impact on social & environmental issues.

¹Sources: PWC, PR Newswire, McKinsey/Nielsen

²Sources: IBM Institute for Business Value & NRF, Meet the 2020 consumers driving change, as cited in Forbes: The Power of Purpose, Part 2; Cone Communications, 2016 Millennial Employee Engagement Study; Cone Communications Report

BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABILITY & OVERCOMING THEM

We recognize that it may not always be straightforward to implement more sustainable practices; however with some creative solutioning, it is possible to incorporate more sustainable actions into your day-to-day business.

In the short term, it can feel like an added cost burden. But in the long-term, it's also about resilience and economic sustainability. As responsible business owners and members of the community, we have a collective responsibility to contribute to a more resilient city and a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.

COST CONCERNS



Start with low-cost, high-impact changes. Look for incentives, grants, energy performance contracts, tax benefits, and vendor collaborations.

LIMITED CONTROL OVER INFRASTRUCTURE (LEASED PROPERTIES)



Collaborate with landlords, property managers, and vendors to identify win-win opportunities or improvements.

TIME CONSTRAINTS



Assign a “sustainability champion” on your team and integrate practices into existing operational procedures.

LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTISE



Use this toolkit as a starting point, start conversations with vendors, and reach out to local partners.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE



Involve your team early, focus first on solutions that have minimal impact on current operations, and share your sustainability vision.

GETTING STARTED

This guide breaks initiatives into **low, medium, and high-effort actions**, so businesses can start small and scale up over time. By making smart, sustainable choices, Houston's hospitality industry can become more **resilient, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible** while delivering outstanding guest experiences.

Across initiatives, you'll typically want to start by:

1. Evaluating your current operations
2. Collecting and understanding your data
3. Determining what assets you have to work with
4. Identifying opportunities that fit your needs
5. Implementing the best actions for you - the toolkit provides step by step instructions



RECOGNIZE YOUR PROGRESS, THEN RAISE THE BAR

ACTION	ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	COST/EFFORT	LEARN MORE
Add customer opt-in requirement for plastic cutlery or similar “to go” items	Reduce waste to landfill	\$	Opt-In Single-Use Items, like Cutlery and Straws, for Takeout
Eliminate Styrofoam containers	Reduce waste to landfill	\$	Replace Styrofoam Takeout with Recyclable Packaging
Implement a recycling program	Reduce waste to landfill	\$ — \$ \$ \$	Recycle - initiatives
Purchase/install renewable energy	Reduce emissions	\$ — \$ \$ \$	Renewable energy initiatives
Switch to LED bulbs	Reduce energy consumption	\$	Energy efficiency initiatives - Switch to LED lighting
Install bike-friendly infrastructure	Reduce emissions	\$	Encourage sustainable transport options
Provide information & incentives for use of public transport	Reduce emissions	\$	Encourage sustainable transport options
Plant trees on property or in the right of way	Resilience, heat mitigation	\$	Develop a tree canopy strategy
Add a small pollinator, rain garden, and/or native plant garden	Resilience, heat mitigation, species conservation	\$	Native landscaping and gardens
Donate surplus food	Support the community, reduce waste to landfill	\$ \$	Donate or resell surplus food in the community
Compost or divert kitchen waste	Reduce waste to landfill, support local gardens	\$ \$	Composting Collection Services; Divert organic waste not fit for human consumption for other uses
Replace single use service items with reusables	Reduce waste to landfill	\$ \$ — \$ \$ \$	Reusable Cups, Serving Dishes, and Cutlery. Bring Your Own Container Program
Develop a pocket prairie	Resilience, heat mitigation, species conservation	\$ \$	Develop a pocket prairie
Source from local farms	Reduce emissions, support local economy	\$ \$ \$	Source ingredients locally
Install EV chargers	Reduce emissions	\$ \$ \$	Install EV charging stations
Get a sustainability certification for restaurants or hotels	Resource efficiency	\$ \$ \$	Sustainability Certifications for Hotels and Restaurants
For hotels: Include in-room waste reduction, reuse, and recycling practices for amenities and service items	Resource efficiency, reduce waste to landfill	\$ \$ — \$ \$ \$	Reduce & Recycle - Additional Opportunities for Hotels

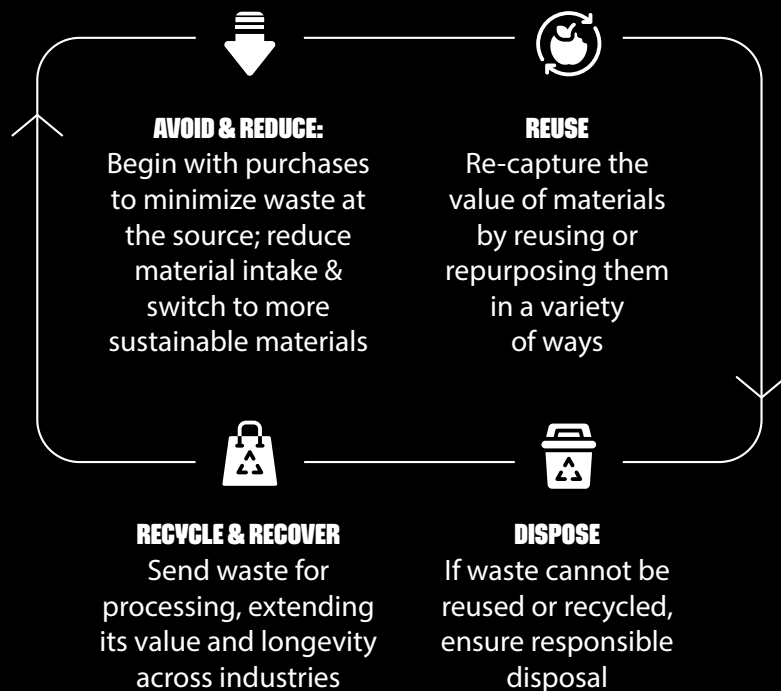


2 **WASTE** **INITIATIVES**



WASTE INITIATIVES - REDUCE, REUSE, & RECYCLE

Waste is any material that can't be used for its original purpose. Sustainability is about reducing waste and maximizing the value of resources.



FOCUS ON AREAS WHERE YOU HAVE THE MOST CONTROL OVER OUTCOMES:

HIGHEST LEVEL OF CONTROL

Your material choices, your in-house servicewear.

SOME LEVEL OF CONTROL

How a customer disposes of materials inside the facility, how a building lease manages waste.

LESS IN YOUR CONTROL

What a customer does with a takeout container, what kind of packaging a vendor uses (especially if you are a small customer with low leverage).

CONSIDER ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION:

- **Back of house** materials will be easier to control - e.g., composting organic waste in the kitchen or recycling cardboard boxes.
- **Front of house** requires more customer engagement
- **Takeout materials** are difficult to ensure responsible end use and often consume the budget of a strong back-of-house program.

MINIMIZE SINGLE-USE ITEMS:

- What products are not being used regularly and can be removed altogether?
- Where are there alternatives to switch to reusable or bulk items?
- Can you move to on-demand items?
- Are there sustainable material alternatives? (e.g., *biodegradable / compostable or recyclable plastic*)

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- > **EVERY BUSINESS GENERATES WASTE!**
- > **MISMANAGED WASTE ENDS UP IN HOUSTON'S BAYOUS AND INTO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN**
- > **CUSTOMER DEMAND FOR WASTE REDUCTION, ESPECIALLY FOR MEETINGS AND SPECIAL EVENTS**
- > **COST SAVINGS BY PROCESSING, STORING, AND TRANSPORTING LESS WASTE OR IDENTIFYING SERVICES FOR HIGH VALUE RECYCLING THAT ARE MORE COST-EFFECTIVE THAN LANDFILL**
- > **COST SAVINGS FROM BETTER MANAGEMENT OF MATERIALS & ACTING ON IMPROVED DATA INSIGHTS**
- > **LANDFILL WASTE HAS A NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON SOIL, LAND USE, AND GREENHOUSE GASES THAT CARRIES A COST TO YOUR COMMUNITY AND TAXPAYERS**



AND DON'T FORGET TO ENGAGE CUSTOMERS

- Provide information on sustainable dining practices
- Offer incentives for customers who minimize waste, such as “clean plate coupons,” discounts, or loyalty points for bringing their own cup
- Promote food waste reduction initiatives through marketing and social media campaigns

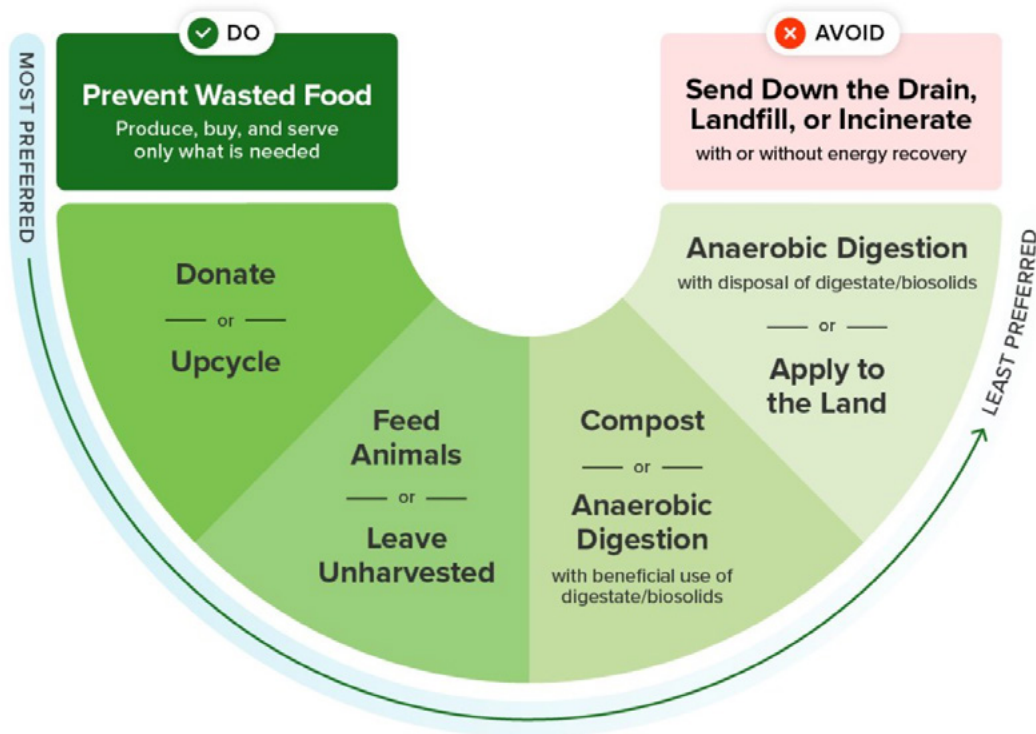


PART 1

FOOD WASTE REDUCTION, RECOVERY, AND ORGANIC WASTE DIVERSION

Why focus on food waste reduction and organic landfill diversion?

Food waste is a major contributor to landfill waste in hospitality businesses. By implementing waste reduction strategies, donation programs, and composting, businesses can lower costs, minimize environmental impact, and support community initiatives. Where food waste can't be reduced or recovered, there is still an opportunity to harness value for local farms and livestock and composting to divert organic waste from landfill.



EPA waste food scale

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: REDUCING FOOD WASTE

WHY DO THIS?

Reducing food waste helps lower costs while also supporting responsible business practices and engagement with customers.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Conduct a food waste audit

- Track food waste over a period to identify patterns and key food waste sources.
- Categorize waste into preparation waste, spoilage, and plate waste.
- Use technology such as smart bins and food waste tracking apps to collect data, or conduct a spot audit manually.
- There are multiple tools for conducting food audits - see *Resources* section.

Improve inventory management

- Implement a First-In, First-Out system to use older stock first.
- Use a digital inventory management software (e.g. BlueCart, MarketMan, WISK, Apicbase, KitchenCUT) to monitor stock levels in real time.

- Explore other site-specific methods to prevent over-purchasing.
- Consider adjusting menus to reflect what is in stock and find creative ways to optimize menu planning.

Optimize menu planning

- Design menus based on seasonal and locally available ingredients.
- Use versatile ingredients across multiple dishes to reduce excess stock.
- Offer portion size options to match customer preferences and reduce leftovers.

Train staff on waste reduction

- Educate employees on proper storage and handling techniques
- Encourage portion control during food preparation.
- Involve staff in identifying areas for improvement; provide incentives to staff for reducing food waste.

Implement smart purchasing practices

- Collaborate with suppliers to order precise quantities based on demand forecasts.
- Choose bulk purchasing where feasible but ensure proper storage to avoid spoilage.

- Establish partnerships with local farms to source fresh, perishable items in smaller quantities.

Enhance storage and preservation techniques

- Store perishable items at the correct temperatures to extend shelf life.
- Use vacuum sealing, freezing, and fermentation to preserve surplus ingredients.
- Label and date all stored food items to ensure timely usage.
- Optimize refrigeration settings to prevent spoilage.

Reduce plate waste

- Offer flexible portion sizes to accommodate different appetites.
- Encourage guests to take leftovers home (*see takeout section for sustainable packaging insights*).
- Use data from food waste audits to refine portion sizes and menu offerings.
- Offer taste samples to customers
- For buffet lines, consider going trayless to minimize plates per customer.

Use surplus food in new ways

- Get creative with excess ingredients—use vegetable scraps for stocks and sauces.
- Create daily specials using surplus food items.
- Develop special menu items using surplus food or “day old” discounts.
- Promote “zero-waste” dishes that highlight sustainability.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Lower purchasing costs through reduced food waste
- Potential savings from reduced waste disposal fees
- Enhanced customer satisfaction with flexible portion sizes and sustainability initiatives

RESOURCES:

U.S. EPA Resources:

- [Food Loss Prevention Options for Restaurants](#)
- [Resources for Assessing Wasted Food \(including forms for food audits\)](#)
- [Additional EPA Tools](#)
- [CET: Business Case for Reducing Waste](#)

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: DONATE OR RESELL SURPLUS FOOD IN THE COMMUNITY

WHY DO THIS?

Donating surplus food reduces waste, supports food security efforts, and provides tax incentives for businesses. It can also garner additional customer support. This option tends to be best for large events or those offering catering or pre-made food like bakeries.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Establish a food donation program.

- Develop a structured plan to identify and track surplus food (see previous).
- Appoint a food recovery champion to oversee operations.
- Set clear policies on food donation and recovery processes.

Partner with reputable, local food banks, shelters, and/or non-profit organizations, such as Second Servings Houston, to establish a food donation process.

- Establish regular donation schedules to ensure food reaches those in need.
- Collaborate with partners to understand donation guidelines and food safety requirements.

- For example, Second Servings operates refrigerated vans that ensure food can be transported safely to those who need it.

Train kitchen staff on food safety protocols for donations.

- Train staff on proper handling, packaging, and storage of donated food.
- Follow local health regulations and best practices for food recovery.
- Label donated food with preparation dates and storage instructions.

Schedule regular pickups based on surplus food generation.

Engage employees and customers.

- Build awareness among team members on the donation program to show your responsible business practices and promote a positive employee experience.
- Market the program to customers and offer options for them to participate in helping the community.
- Participate in local food rescue events and awareness campaigns.

- Sponsor or host food recovery workshops and activities.

Other options for food recovery.

- Offer surplus food to employees
- Provide discounts or recovery options to customers.
- Resell surplus food on dedicated apps (e.g. Too Good to Go).

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Tax benefits for donating food.
- Employee, customer, and community engagement.
- Collection and transportation costs, if not provided by the non-profit.

RESOURCES:

- [Second Servings Houston for regular food donations](#)
- [Too Good to Go for reselling opportunities](#)
- [Houston Health Department, Food Programs Guidelines](#)

U.S. EPA Resources:

- [Food Loss Prevention Options for Restaurants](#)
- [Resources for Assessing Wasted Food \(including forms for food audits\)](#)
- [Additional EPA Tools](#)
- [CET: Business Case for Reducing Waste](#)

- [EPA Excess Food Opportunities Map](#)
- [ReFED Solutions Provider Directory](#)



FEDERAL LAW

Federal laws exist to encourage food donation. Under the federal “Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act” of 1996, food donors are protected from civil and criminal liability when donating in good faith to nonprofits, except in cases of gross negligence or intentional misconduct.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency actively supports food donation and has training tools, worksheets and other resources available for restaurant and hotel use. [See U.S. EPA, Resources for Assessing Wasted Food](#)

The Houston Health Department offers [guidance](#) on proper storage and transport and other ways to donate food.

The Houston Food Bank provides [information on food donations](#).

CASE STUDY

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE: LOCAL FOOD RESCUE IN ACTION

In the bustling world of large-scale hospitality and events, surplus food is often an unfortunate reality—especially with the unpredictability of event attendance. Instead of letting perfectly good meals go to waste, several of Houston’s leading hotels and its largest convention center have joined forces with Second Servings of Houston to make a meaningful difference.

HOW IT WORKS

Through this partnership, culinary teams at each property are empowered to redirect unserved, chef-prepared meals—along with fresh produce, snacks, and beverages—to people facing food insecurity. When excess food remains after an event, a simple call to Second Servings sets the process in motion. Their team of food safety-certified drivers arrive in refrigerated vans to collect the donations and quickly deliver them to local shelters, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

IMPACT

Thousands of pounds of food provided annually to local shelters, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

PARTNERS

Second Servings of Houston

Hilton Americas-Houston

Marriott Marquis

Four Seasons Hotel

George R. Brown Convention Center

Levy Restaurants

DIVERT - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: DIVERT ORGANIC WASTE NOT FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION FOR OTHER USES

WHY DO THIS?

Reduce waste, build community relationships, and engage employees.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- **Use your waste audit results to identify potential materials for donation.**
- **Collection** - set up collection bins in kitchens for items such as coffee grounds or oyster shells.
- **Training** - educate kitchen employees on the importance of separating those materials.
- **Partner with local organizations** (e.g. parks, community gardens, non-profits).
- **Plan logistics** - work with other businesses in the area to aggregate collections or local volunteers to help distribute to community partners.
- **Communicate with customers** - inform guests about the initiative through signage and marketing.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Minimal costs (key expense is transportation or pickup coordination).
- Potential branding opportunities for sustainability efforts.

RESOURCES:

- [Galveston Bay Foundation](#)
- Work with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department or community gardens for distribution
- Contact local farms or work with your vendors

CASE STUDY



COFFEE GROUNDS FOR PARKS PROGRAM WITH MARRIOTT & HERMANN PARK

Coffee grounds are rich in nitrogen and beneficial for soil health. Donating used coffee grounds reduces organic waste while supporting local parks and gardens.



CASE STUDY

OYSTER SHELL RECYCLING FOR REEF RESTORATION

In the fast-paced world of restaurants, discarded oyster shells typically end up in landfills—wasted along with other trash. But those same shells have the potential to play a powerful role in marine restoration.

HOW IT WORKS

Since 2011, the Galveston Bay Foundation's Oyster Shell Recycling Program has teamed up with restaurants across Houston, Clear Lake, and Galveston to collect shucked oyster shells. These shells are quarantined for at least six months to ensure all bacteria and non-native species have been eliminated. Then they are returned to Galveston Bay to help rebuild oyster reefs. These restored reefs provide critical habitat for oysters and other marine life, helping to strengthen the entire ecosystem.

IMPACT

Galveston Bay Foundation has collected over four million pounds of oyster shells and provided shoreline protection and reef creation.

PARTNERS

[Galveston Bay Foundation](#)

Local restaurants across Houston, Clear Lake, and Galveston

[View their full list of restaurant partners that recycle their shucked oyster shells.](#)

DIVERT - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: COMPOSTING COLLECTION SERVICES

WHY DO THIS?

Partnering with a composting service provider can transform your kitchen waste into a powerful resource, cutting emissions and building a greener brand. Start diverting food scraps today to reduce your environmental footprint, meet sustainability commitments, and show leadership in your community.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Assess organic waste output

- Conduct a simple audit to understand what types and how much food and organic waste your operation generates.

Select a provider

- Research and partner with a local compost collection company that services your area.
- Existing local vendors include Moonshot Compost, Happy Earth Compost, and Zero Waste Houston.

Decide on scope

- It may be easier and more cost effective to start with “back of house” collection rather than “front of house” collection.

Clarify with your provider what items you will compost

- Food scraps, coffee grounds, compostable packaging, etc.

Implement your collection system

- Place clearly labeled compost bins in kitchen prep areas, dish return stations, and other high-waste zones.

Train Staff

- Educate employees on what materials are compostable.

Schedule pickups & track progress

- Monitor waste reduction and adjust pickup frequency as needed.
- Work with your provider to track how much waste you’re diverting from landfills.

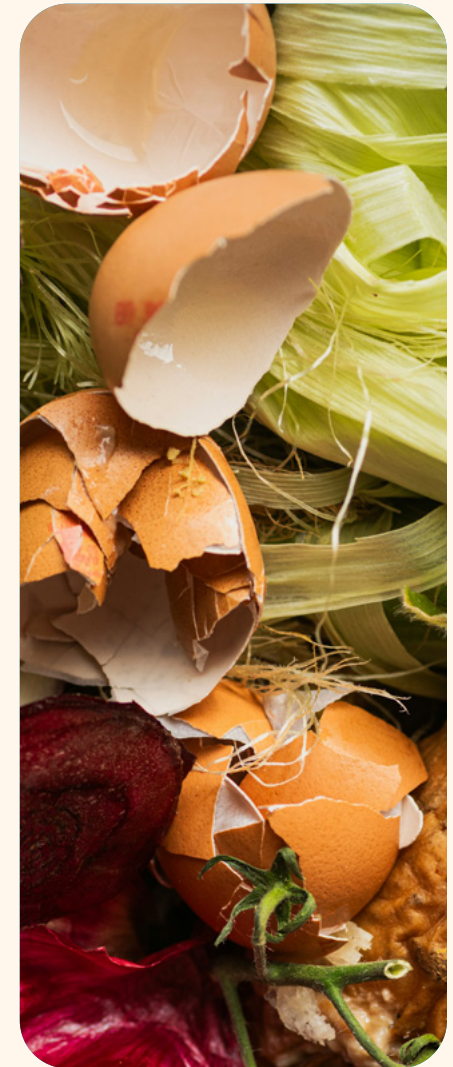
ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Composting services may require a fee—however, composting can reduce overall waste disposal costs by lowering the volume of trash sent to landfills, especially where compactors are being used.

- Sustainability programs like composting can enhance brand image, attract eco-conscious customers, and create a competitive edge.
- Waste audits required for composting programs often uncover inefficiencies in food purchasing and preparation, leading to additional cost savings.
- Some cities and states have food waste diversion regulations; composting helps avoid penalties for non-compliance.

RESOURCES:

- [Moonshot Compost](#)
- [Happy Earth Compost](#)
- [Zero Waste Houston](#)
- In addition to composting, anaerobic digestion or other energy related diversion methods may be available locally. Check out resources like [Divert](#).



CASE STUDY

LEVEN BAKERY & CAFÉ — A RECIPE FOR SUSTAINABILITY WITH MOONSHOT COMPOST

In May 2024, Leven Bakery & Café, a beloved locally owned business in Houston, Texas, partnered with Moonshot Compost to tackle food waste. With a passion for fresh, local ingredients and community engagement, Leven recognized composting as a natural extension of their mission to nourish both people and the planet.

HOW IT WORKS

Leven began composting at their original Bellaire location and soon expanded the program to Café Ion. Through Moonshot's reliable collection and tracking services, they have diverted 11,620 pounds of food waste from local landfills in just over a year.

Taking their impact further, Leven launched a public compost drop-off site outside the Bellaire location. Now, local residents can participate in composting efforts—reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting soil regeneration, and building a stronger community connection.

IMPACT

- 11,620 pounds of food waste diverted from landfills in just over a year
- Public compost drop-off site for local residents
- Strengthened community ties through shared sustainability efforts

PARTNERS

Leven Bakery & Café

Moonshot Compost

Photo courtesy of Moonshot Compost

PART 2

RECYCLING (NON-ORGANICS)

First, it's important to clarify what recycling facilities are available to you. Depending on your size and building arrangements, you may be served by the city, have your own private hauler, or waste management may be included in a lease agreement. This will influence what materials are accepted in recycling streams.

The City of Houston's Neighborhood Depositories & Recycling Centers provide information on what is typically accepted:

- ✓ **METAL AND CANS:** Aluminum and Tin Cans. Examples include soup cans, vegetable cans, fruit cans, coffee cans (emptied and rinsed).
- ✓ **CARTONS:** Both gable top and shelf-stable food and beverage cartons. Examples include milk cartons, juice cartons, soup cartons, soy milk/alternative milk cartons (emptied and rinsed).
- ✓ **GLASS:** Bottles, jugs and jars only (emptied and rinsed).
- ✓ **PAPER:** Newspaper, magazines, catalogs, junk mail, and office paper.
- ✓ **CARDBOARD:** Cardboard and cereal boxes (emptied of packing materials and flattened).
- ✓ **PLASTIC:** Bottles, tubs and jugs #1 - 5 and 7. Examples include water and soda bottles, milk jugs, yogurt cups, margarine tubs, detergent bottles, shampoo bottles (emptied and rinsed).



And what is typically not accepted curbside:

- ✗ **BATTERIES/ELECTRONICS**
- ✗ **SHREDDED PAPER**
- ✗ **TANGLERS (CORDS, HOSES, WIRES, CLOTHING)**
- ✗ **FOOD/LIQUIDS**
- ✗ **TRASH AND BAGGED RECYCLING**
- ✗ **FURNITURE AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS**
- ✗ **SCRAP WOOD AND SCRAP METAL (NO HELIUM TANKS)**
- ✗ **YARD WASTE**

RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: BASIC WASTE SEGREGATION & RECYCLING FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

WHY DO THIS?

Proper waste segregation reduces landfill costs, enhances operational efficiency, and aligns with Houston's recycling programs.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Contact Houston Solid Waste Management to determine eligibility for city-provided recycling services (ideal for small to medium-sized businesses), which offer one to four 96-gallon green containers, collected biweekly.
- Set up clearly marked bins for general waste, recycling, and organics in guest and staff areas.
- Train staff & guests using pictures and signage to ensure proper waste sorting.
- Place bins in visible areas with clear instructions for sorting materials.
- If not already provided by the city, arrange for pickup or drop-off based on your recycling volume.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Minimal cost for bins and signage (nominal fee paid to City of Houston).
- Potential savings on waste disposal fees.

RESOURCES:

- [Houston Business Recycling Program](#)



RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: PARTNER WITH PRIVATE RECYCLING PROVIDERS

WHY DO THIS?

For businesses not eligible for city recycling services or those needing higher-capacity solutions, private recycling companies offer customized programs.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Assess your recycling needs, including volume and material types (glass, plastic, aluminum, cardboard) and your highest sources of recyclable materials.
- Identify a private recycling provider that serves businesses in Houston.
- Set up a contract with a provider for regular pickups.
- Provide designated bins and train staff on proper sorting procedures.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Cost of service varies based on recycling volume.

- Potential savings on landfill fees if recycling offsets waste disposal costs.
- Customer engagement opportunities with visible sustainability initiatives.
- Space requirements.

RESOURCES:

- [FCC Environmental Services](#)
- [Waste Management Commercial Recycling](#)
- [Recyclops](#)
- [CheckSammy](#)
- [Republic Services](#)

RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: RECYCLING BACK-OF-HOUSE PACKAGING

WHY DO THIS?

For many hospitality businesses, packaging may form a significant amount of their waste, and separating and recycling materials ensures the value of this material is not lost to landfill. Back-of-house focus limits the potential for contamination of recycling by customers.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Recycle cardboard

- Set up designated bins for cardboard packaging.
- Large facilities (e.g. hotels) may warrant specialized equipment like bailers.

Manage plastic film waste:

- Work with Cyclyx or other partners to identify plastic film collection opportunities.

Separate and clean recyclables

- Rinse and sort steel cans, PET bottles, and HDPE containers.

Train kitchen staff

- Educate employees on proper waste sorting and recycling practices.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Lower disposal costs through better recycling practices (if landfill costs can be reduced).
- Lower potential for contamination fees.
- Storage space, e.g. loading docks for larger facilities.

RESOURCES:

- [Cyclyx](#)
- [GFL Cardboard Recycling](#)
- [Mid America Paper Recycling](#)
- [FCC Environmental Services](#)
- [Waste Management Commercial Recycling](#)
- [Recyclops](#)
- [CheckSammy](#)
- [Republic Services](#)

RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: WORK WITH BUILDING MANAGEMENT FOR RECYCLING SERVICES

WHY DO THIS?

Many leased properties lack dedicated recycling services, but businesses can advocate for improved waste management in their building. This can lead to win-win opportunities, where the building can reduce landfill costs and your business can improve sustainability.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Contact building management to inquire about existing recycling contracts.
- Request recycling services if they are not already included in the lease agreement.
- Collaborate with neighboring businesses to increase demand for shared recycling programs, potentially lowering costs.
- Understand what is collected by the waste vendor.
- Place clear signage for recycling stations to ensure compliance with guidelines.

- Provide clearly marked bins in staff and customer areas to separate waste streams.
- Train staff & guests to properly sort recyclables and where to segregate materials in the building.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Minimal cost for bins and signage.
- Possible cost savings for building owner if landfill fees decrease through better waste management agreements.
- Customer engagement opportunities with visible sustainability initiatives.

RESOURCES:

- Contact your building management company directly.

For leased properties, waste management may not be in your direct control. This requires more engagement and creativity.



Photo courtesy of Houston First

RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: BAIL AND SELL RECYCLABLE MATERIALS

WHY DO THIS?

Bailing and selling recyclable material is a great opportunity for those with high recyclable waste generation to make money from recyclables, instead of paying for recycling or waste management services.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Assess your volume by material type to determine if this is an option for your business to generate income or at least offset waste management costs.
- Determine appropriate equipment and infrastructure investment needed.
- Consider any available “sustainable” low interest loans or “circularity as a service models” to offset upfront costs.
- Make a maintenance plan.
- Secure offtake for the recyclable materials.
- Purchase and install infrastructure.
- Train staff and ensure appropriate safety measures.
- Record data and cost savings or income generation.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Potential revenue generation over time or elimination of waste management costs for those materials.
- Requires upfront investment and mechanical equipment maintenance.

RESOURCES:

- [Scrap Management](#)
- [RePackify](#)



AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: REDUCE PACKAGING WASTE COMING IN

WHY DO THIS?

Hospitality businesses generate significant packaging waste from both back-of-house operations and customer-facing activities. Avoiding unnecessary materials reduces disposal costs and generates less waste.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Reduce packaging & non-recyclable materials coming in

- Review key sources of material waste coming into your facility - identify any high impact vendors or materials (e.g. cardboard, packing peanuts).
- Work with vendors to reduce or substitute packaging materials.

- Select larger or bulk options to reduce multiple, smaller packaging items.
- Switch from small customer packaging to bulk, especially for in-house condiments and creamers.
- Explore opportunities for vendors to take back some or all of the packaging materials for reuse or recycling through reverse logistics.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Potential partnerships with suppliers for “win-win” reduction in excess packaging.

RESOURCES:

Contact your vendors directly.

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: OPT-IN SINGLE-USE ITEMS, LIKE CUTLERY AND STRAWS, FOR TAKEOUT

WHY DO THIS?

Reduces unnecessary waste and lowers operational costs.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- **Update ordering systems** - Configure point of sale systems to offer cutlery/straws only if customers opt in.
- **Train staff** - Ensure front-line employees understand and follow the new system to not automatically give customers plastic cutlery or straws.
- **Communicate with customers** - Use signage and digital menus to inform customers.
- **Monitor usage** - Track reductions in single use materials and adjust orders accordingly.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Cost savings from reduced cutlery/straw purchases.

RESOURCES:

- [Plastic free July](#)



AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: REPLACE STYROFOAM CONTAINERS WITH RECYCLABLE PACKAGING

WHY DO THIS?

Styrofoam is not curb-side recyclable in Houston. Switching to more sustainable packaging improves waste management and aligns with customer expectations.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Review current packaging

- Identify items to replace (e.g., Styrofoam clamshells, trays, cups).
- Select alternatives.
- Use PET, PP, paper-fiber-based, bio-based, or compostable materials.
- Train staff.
- Ensure employees correctly

separate recyclable waste.

- Promote to customers.
- Highlight sustainability efforts on menus and packaging.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

Slightly higher material costs but more durable containers and potential offsets through customer engagement.

RESOURCES:

- [Eco Products](#)
- [Cookist: How to Recycle Food Takeout Containers](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about Plastic Recycling and Composting | US EPA](#)



AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: REUSABLE CUPS, SERVING DISHES, AND CUTLERY FOR CATERING, COUNTER SERVICE, AND COFFEE SHOPS

WHY DO THIS?

Reduces single-use material waste, lowers supply costs, and enhances sustainability branding.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Assess your space and utility requirements for washing stations.

Invest in reusable cups, serveware or cutlery

- Purchase durable, high-quality cups, or serveware for in-house dining and catering.

Train staff

- Educate employees on handling, sanitizing, and managing reusable cups and serveware.

Set up washing facilities

- Ensure dishwashing areas are equipped for increased cup or service wear washing.

Promote the initiative

- Inform customers via signage, digital menus, and staff communication.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Initial investment in reusable cups and washing infrastructure.
- Long-term savings on single-use cup purchases.
- Improved sustainability branding and customer perception.

RESOURCES:

- [Reusable Food Serveware Guide](#)
- [Switching to reuse for onsite dining in food service](#)

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: OFFER A REUSE OR “BRING YOUR OWN” CONTAINER PROGRAM

WHY DO THIS?

Further reduces waste and provides long-term cost savings.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Choose a Model

- Reuse partner: While collection infrastructure for reuse-as-a-service was not widely available in Houston at time of this toolkit, it could be an option later on.
- Consider semi-reusable containers, where to-go containers are considered safe for washing and multiple uses by the customer.
- Offer a “bring your own cup” for to-go coffee or similar simple takeout options.

Educate Customers

- Offer incentives (e.g., deposit refunds, discounts, or loyalty points for bringing their own cup).

Organize internally

- Provide return bins at entry points for reuse collection and appropriate washing stations.
- Train staff on how personal cups can be used.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Higher upfront investment if using a reusable takeout model (leveraging your own dedicated reusable containers) but reduced packaging costs over time.
- Cost savings on disposable cups if implementing a “bring your own cup” model.
- Potential for customer incentives and engagement benefits.

RESOURCES:

- [Starbucks Reusable Cups](#)
- [Zero Waste Chef](#)



ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOTELS

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: ELIMINATING OR REDUCING SINGLE-USE AMENITIES

WHY DO THIS?

Traditional single-use toiletries generate plastic waste. Installing refillable dispensers reduces packaging and product waste, lowers costs on amenities, and creates housekeeping efficiencies.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- **Choose high-quality dispensers** - Select durable, tamper-proof refillable containers.
- **Source bulk toiletries** - Partner with suppliers to purchase shampoo, soap, and lotion in bulk.
- **Train housekeeping staff** - Ensure dispensers are refilled and maintained regularly.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Lower long-term costs compared to purchasing single-use toiletries.
- Potential labor and operational impact to the room cleaning process.
- Waste reduction benefits.
- Improved customer experience if made convenient.

RESOURCES:

- [Hotel Magazine](#)
- [Packaging Dive](#)

CASE STUDY



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

In August 2019, Marriott International announced its work to transition from single-use small bottle guest bath amenities (i.e., shampoo, conditioner, body wash) to residential-size large bottles for its brand approved bath amenities. This change was spurred by the need to meet evolving customer expectations, new legislative requirements for sustainable product options and the need for cost effective amenity solutions for hotels. [Learn more](#)



ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOTELS

AVOID & REDUCE - INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: REDUCING WASTE FROM IN-ROOM SERVICE ITEMS

WHY DO THIS?

Hotels use a high volume of disposable in-room service items. Switching to ceramic, glass, and stainless steel alternatives eliminates unnecessary waste and is a common strategy for many hotel brands.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Replace disposable cups & glassware with reusable options for trays, glassware, and similar.
- Reduce room service packaging and in-room amenity packaging (e.g. for coffee and tea).

- Communicate changes by informing guests through room signage or digital communications.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Higher initial investment, but long-term savings from eliminating disposable items.
- Enhanced guest experience with premium in-room amenities.

RESOURCES:

- Contact your vendors directly for options



RECYCLE - INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: IN-ROOM GUEST RECYCLING PROGRAMS

WHY DO THIS?

Providing recycling bins in hotel rooms helps divert waste from landfills and supports sustainability goals.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Check with your housekeeping, culinary, engineering, and other teams to identify material types.
- Identify space, logistics, and offtake requirements for recycling (see *recycling section*).

Install in-room recycling bins

- Provide clearly labeled bins for paper, plastic, and aluminum.

Train housekeeping staff

- Ensure staff properly sorts recyclables from trash.

Partner with recycling providers

- Work with city services or private providers for regular recycling collection (see *recycling section*).

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Initial investment in bins and staff training.
- Reduced waste disposal costs over time.
- Improved guest perception of sustainability initiatives.

RESOURCES:

- [How to Maximize Hotel Recycling](#)
- [Hotel/Motel Waste Reduction](#)

3

ENERGY INITIATIVES



POWERING HOUSTON'S FUTURE TOGETHER

Improving energy efficiency, reducing energy consumption, and adopting renewable energy sources can significantly reduce operational costs and environmental impact in hospitality businesses.

Greenhouse gas emissions from certain energy sources trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, which can intensify natural disasters and extreme weather events. Extreme weather events impact Houston in particular - from Hurricane Harvey to Beryl to increased flooding risks, businesses are impacted significantly. We all need to do our part to improve resilience in our city, including the resilience of our properties.



RENEWABLE ENERGY INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: PURCHASE RENEWABLE ENERGY CREDITS (RECS) OR A 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY PLAN

WHY DO THIS?

Purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs) or opting for a 100% renewable energy plan helps offset carbon emissions.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Contact energy providers to select a renewable energy package.
- Verify certification to ensure the plan sources from clean energy providers.
- If you don't have control over the plan, consider purchasing renewable energy credits.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Renewable energy plans may have an upcharge, but it's important to shop around for the right plan for you.
- If you don't have control of the energy provider, renewable energy credits may be an additional cost that may be partially offset through marketing efforts and customer engagement.

RESOURCES:

- [Green Mountain Energy](#)
- [Shell](#)
- [Reliant](#)



RENEWABLE ENERGY INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: INSTALL SOLAR PANELS

WHY DO THIS?

Solar energy often helps reduce reliance on grid electricity, leading to long-term energy cost savings and lower carbon emissions.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Conduct a feasibility study.
- Apply for rebates or incentives from local and state programs.
- Work with a certified solar installer to design and install the system.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Upfront investment, though zero interest or low interest plans and “energy as a service” options may be available.
- Cost savings possible over long-term.

RESOURCES:

- [Texas PACE](#)
- [Houston Renewable Energy Group](#)
- [City of Houston Green Building Resource Center](#)
- Contact local solar installation companies.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: SWITCH TO LED LIGHTING

WHY DO THIS?

Implementing energy-efficient lighting solutions can lower electricity consumption, reduce costs, and enhance guest experience. LED lighting is more energy efficient than fluorescent or halogen bulbs. It also has a longer lifespan, reducing replacement and maintenance costs.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- **Assess current lighting usage;** identify areas where incandescent, halogen, or fluorescent bulbs are still in use.
- **Replace bulbs with LEDs,** prioritizing high-use areas such as kitchens, dining spaces, lobbies, and hallways.
- **Choose ENERGY STAR-Certified LEDs** as these offer high efficiency and reliability.
- **Monitor energy savings and track electricity usage** before and after the switch to measure cost reductions.

- **Maintenance Reduction**
LEDs last longer, saving on labor and replacement costs.

RESOURCES:

- [Earthtronics: How LED Lighting Enhances the Dining Experience](#)



Photo courtesy of Houston First

OTHER WAYS TO IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY:

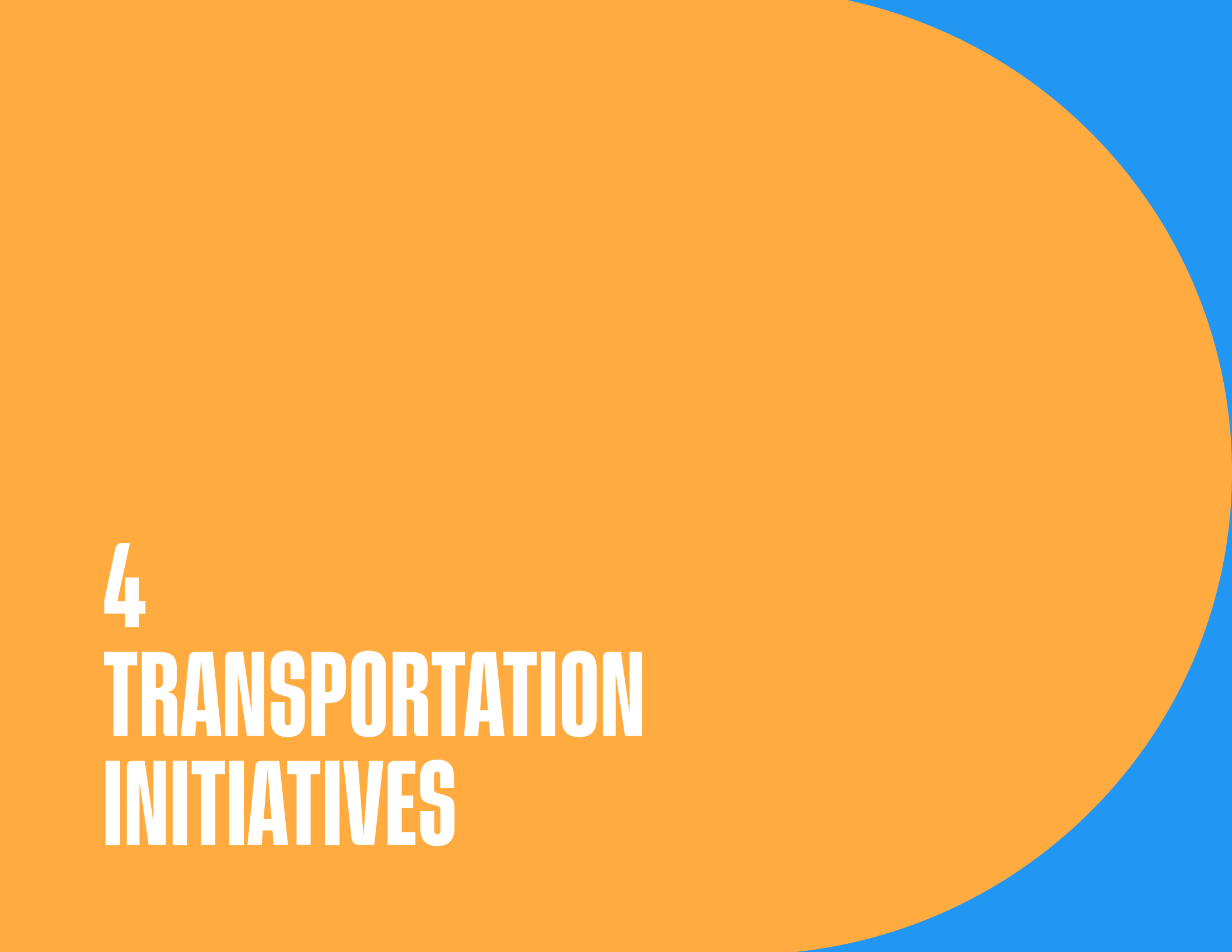
- ✓ **INSTALL SMART LIGHTING UPGRADES** like motion sensors, daylight sensors, timers and schedules. [Find out more about use in hotels.](#)
- ✓ **WORK WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS** on advanced energy efficiency measures. [Example from Hilton and Schneider Electric.](#)
- ✓ **SAVE ENERGY WITH IMPROVED HVAC MAINTENANCE** like cleaning coils and filters, checking refrigerant levels, and inspecting insulation to prevent energy waste.
- ✓ **SET THERMOSTATS TO EFFICIENT RANGES** and consider using timers, smart thermostats, and occupancy-based settings for HVAC.

For more detailed guidance on energy management, check out the [Green Restaurant Association's Energy Standard](#).





Photo courtesy of Houston First



4 TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES



DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY FORWARD

Transportation is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, but it's also a place where hospitality businesses can make a visible, guest-friendly impact. Low-carbon options—like electric shuttles, bike-friendly amenities, and walkable connections—can reduce your carbon footprint.

These efforts don't just help the planet—they also give your property a competitive edge. Guests are increasingly drawn to businesses that align with their values, and sustainable transit options show your commitment to responsible operations. Below are strategies, organized by effort level, to help you choose the right fit for your property and guests.



Photo courtesy of Metro

TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT OPTIONS

WHY DO THIS?

Simple modifications to guest services can support more sustainable travel and a positive guest experience without significant costs.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Provide public transport information, support, and integration

- Offer guests convenient access to Metro details within the establishment, on websites, or via mobile apps.
- Advanced planning, directly or indirectly through a community/collective format, can provide additional opportunities to integrate into public transportation planning (e.g. *working together to secure additional vehicle support, temporary stops to support guests/customers, and more*).

Install secure, bike-friendly infrastructure

- Provide a secure bike rack, lock-up stations, and/or a bike repair station.

Incentivize low carbon transport

- Offer discounts or perks for guests who walk, bike, use EVs, or use public transit.

Encourage employee commuter benefits

- Provide incentives for staff who carpool, use public transport, walk, or cycle to work.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Minimal investment, primarily signage and marketing.
- Enhances sustainability branding and guest experience.

RESOURCES:

- [Bike Houston](#)
- [Ride Metro](#)
- [Visit Houston Texas](#)

FOR HOTELS



EXPANDING SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL OPTIONS

Utilize digital solutions - Integrate public transport information into your hotel app or website, making it simple for guests to plan eco-friendly trips around the city.

Connect guests and staff - Offer shuttle services or microtransit options that link your property to key venues, attractions, or major transportation hubs. This reduces reliance on personal vehicles and creates a smoother travel experience.

Offer bikes as an amenity - Provide a small fleet of bicycles for guests to rent for a few hours or the day, giving them a fun, healthy, and low-carbon way to explore the local area.



TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: SUPPORT MICRO-MOBILITY OR ELECTRIC SHUTTLE SERVICES

WHY DO THIS?

Providing sustainable transportation options improves accessibility and reduces reliance on personal vehicles.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- **Host micromobility stations** (E-Bikes & Scooters) or connect into public transit services.
- **Educate guests by providing maps and information** on nearby micro-mobility and public transit options.
- **Partner with Metro to generate a plan** and connect guests with electric shuttle services for local attractions.
- **Share schedules and booking options** with guests through websites, apps, or concierge services.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Low-cost implementation with potential for increased guest convenience.
- Enhances brand reputation as an eco-friendly hospitality provider.
- Opportunities to formulate cooperatives and offtake agreements that help reduce the CAPEX and/or OPEX of solutions.

RESOURCES:

- [Lime](#)
- [Bird](#)
- [Evolve Houston](#)
- [Ride Metro](#)



Photo courtesy of Evolve Houston

TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: INSTALL EV CHARGING STATIONS

WHY DO THIS?

The rise of electric vehicles (EVs) presents an opportunity for hospitality businesses to attract customers and generate additional revenue.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Assess site feasibility

- Evaluate available space and electrical capacity for installation.

Partner with EV charging providers

- Work with local EV support organizations like Evolve Houston to learn more about the current and future demand as well as connecting with equipment and installation providers.

Utilize incentives

- Apply for incentives with state and local governments, retail electric providers, cooperatives, and other organizations.

Promote charging availability

- Advertise EV charging stations to guests through hotel and restaurant websites, apps, and signage.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Initial investment for planning and installation, but long-term benefits from increased foot traffic and potential charging revenues, added amenities, and more.
- Future-proofs the business as EV adoption increases.
- Opportunities to formulate cooperatives and offtake agreements that help reduce the CAPEX and/or OPEX of solutions.

RESOURCES:

- [Evolve Houston](#)
- [Pangea Charging](#)
- [CenterPoint Energy](#) or your local electric utility
- Retail electric providers



Photo courtesy of Pangea Charging



5

NATURE-BASED INITIATIVES



CULTIVATING NATURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Landscapes are more than just outdoor spaces—they're opportunities to bring sustainability to life in ways that benefit both your property and the community. By incorporating natural practices, you can enhance biodiversity, conserve water, and create inviting environments that boost your facility's overall appeal.

Eco-friendly landscaping does more than look beautiful. It supports local ecosystems, strengthens community resilience, and signals your commitment to responsible operations. Guests and visitors increasingly notice when businesses make choices that align with environmental values, and natural design can become a visible, lasting marker of that commitment.



MD Anderson Prairie, photo courtesy of Jaime Gonzalez

NATURE-BASED INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: ADD SMALL POLLINATOR, RAIN GARDENS AND/OR NATIVE PLANT GARDENS

WHY DO THIS?

Installing a small native or pollinator-friendly garden helps reduce stormwater runoff and erosion, lower irrigation and maintenance needs, support local pollinators and biodiversity, and beautify your spaces.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Choose a Suitable Location

- Select a sunny or partly shaded outdoor space that guests can see.
- For rain gardens: choose a spot where water naturally flows or collects but drains within 1–2 days.

Assess Soil and Drainage

- Perform a drainage test (dig a 6” hole, fill with water, and ensure it drains within 24 hours).
- If needed, amend with compost or sand for better infiltration.
- Consider a bioswale, vegetated drainage that naturally filters pollutants and helps soil absorb water, limiting runoff.

Pick Your Plants and

- Use native, drought-tolerant species suited to Houston’s climate.
- For pollinator support, include milkweed, salvia, coneflowers, and other native grasses, shrubs, or trees.
- Check out the resources section for specific guides.

Source plants or seeds locally

Plant strategically

- Group plants with similar sun and water needs together.
- Consider the appropriate time of year for planting.
- Use deep-rooted natives in the center of rain gardens and groundcovers on slopes.

Add Signage or Certification

- Explain your sustainability effort to guests with a small sign.
- Become an official Monarch Way Station and/or NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat.

Consider using rainwater harvesting for landscape watering

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Low water use can mean long-term cost savings.
- Native gardens require less fertilizer, pesticides, and maintenance.

RESOURCES:

- [Coastal Prairie Conservancy Nine Natives](#)
- [Native Plant Society of Texas](#)
- [Texas Prairie](#)
- [Urban Harvest Gardening Guide](#)
- [Native Landscape Plants for Harris County](#)
- [Native and adapted plants for Houston](#)
- [Earth Kind Landscaping](#) (Environmentally friendly practices ranging from design considerations to irrigation)

- [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Publications:](#)
 - Rainwater Harvesting AGEN-PU-078
 - Making a Rain Barrel SCSC-PU-254
 - Rainwater Harvesting: Raingardens AGEN-PU-153
 - Creating an Insect & Pollinator Friendly Garden ENTO-PU-177

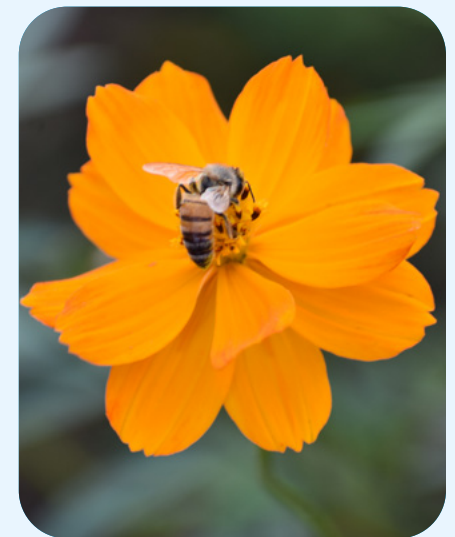


Photo courtesy of Hermann Park Conservancy

NATURE-BASED INITIATIVES

MEDIUM EFFORT: DEVELOP A POCKET PRAIRIE

WHY DO THIS?

For those with larger green spaces, pocket prairies help mitigate flooding, are easier to maintain, and can save money by using less fertilizer and water. They add color, protect habitats, and showcase local Houston ecosystems.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Partner with local organizations or native landscaping companies to help you:

- Choose the right location that is also visible to guests.
- Assess the site and create a design plan with native plant species- consider [9 Natives](#) and/ or [this H-E-B funded pollinator initiative](#).
- Prepare the soil.
- Select native prairie plants.
- Plant your prairie.

Maintain the prairie with seasonal care

Advertise and celebrate your prairie with signage and educational activities

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Cost reduction: Low maintenance and irrigation costs with less need for mowing or chemical fertilizers.

RESOURCES:

- [Here in Houston: Detailed Guide on Pocket Prairies](#)
- [Coastal Prairie Conservancy](#)
- [Nine Natives Booklet](#)
- [H-E-B funded pollinator initiative](#)
- [Texas Master Naturalist](#)
- [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Publications](#)
 - Successional Stages of Commonly Found Commercial Native Seed Varieties RWFM-PU-369
 - Native Seeds: Understanding the Types of Commercial Seed Sources RWFM-PU-370
 - Reseeding Natives in South Texas: Planting Techniques and Equipment RWFM-PU-228
 - Restoring Native Grasslands RWFM-PU-071

NATURE-BASED INITIATIVES

LOW EFFORT: DEVELOP A TREE CANOPY STRATEGY

WHY DO THIS?

Help mitigate heat, beautify your space and the neighborhood, and welcome guests.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Identify location like a patio area, right of way along your fence or sidewalk, or other green space availability

Assess Site:

- Choose the right location that is also visible to guests.
- **Environmental factors:** Will you need a tree that grows in low light? Are you planting in the ground or will you need a pot? What time of year is best for planting?
- **Infrastructure factors:** Make note of infrastructure or potential safety hazards such as powerlines or utility lines. Consider pavement, sidewalks, and areas that could be impacted by tree roots.
- Partner with an organization like Houston Parks and

Recreation Department, Trees for Houston, or Texas A&M Forest Service.

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Cost reduction: Low maintenance and irrigation costs with less need for mowing or chemical fertilizers.

RESOURCES:

- [Trees for Houston](#)
- [Texas A&M Forest Service](#) and their [tool to help people select trees](#)



Photo courtesy of Hermann Park Conservancy

CASE STUDY

POLLINATOR GARDEN AT HELIX PARK

In the heart of Houston's Texas Medical Center, an overlooked green space has been transformed into a thriving Pollinator Garden. In just two months, the garden was brought to life with native plants like milkweed, sustainable fertilization practices, and creative seed "bee bombs." More than a garden, it is a living classroom and a vibrant symbol of environmental stewardship.

HOW IT WORKS

The Pollinator Garden was designed to nurture biodiversity by planting species that support pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Sustainable practices, including microlight fertilizers and seed dispersal techniques, ensure long-term growth and resilience. In addition, over 1,700 native trees have been planted across Helix Park to reduce the urban heat effect, improve air quality, and create a more welcoming habitat for both wildlife and people.

IMPACT

The Pollinator Garden and more than 1,700 native trees at Helix Park are reducing urban heat, improving air quality, and creating vital habitat for pollinators like bees and butterflies. These efforts strengthen local biodiversity while offering the Houston community shaded, educational spaces that highlight the importance of conservation and sustainability.

PARTNERS

Texas Medical Center

Local conservation and environmental education initiatives

Photo courtesy of Texas Medical Center

NATURE-BASED INITIATIVES

HIGH EFFORT: SOURCE INGREDIENTS LOCALLY

WHY DO THIS?

Sourcing local fruits, vegetables, and other ingredients from area farms allows you to reduce transportation footprint and costs, while offering local items to customers and fostering positive community connections.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

- Identify farms using regenerative agriculture practices.
- Purchase seasonal produce from local farmers' markets.
- For bars: Install a microgreen cabinet (e.g. Eden Grow Systems).

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

- Consider costs of local sourcing compared to market prices and look for efficiencies or cost-reduction opportunities (e.g. in-season purchasing).

RESOURCES:

- [Plant It Forward Farms](#)
- [Urban Harvest Farmers Markets](#)
- [Eden Grow Systems](#)
- [Finca Tres Robles](#)



ADDITIONAL TIPS

MINIMIZING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Sustainability includes how we manage air, water, and nature in our facilities. Thoughtful practices can reduce waste, conserve vital resources, and create healthier spaces for both people and the planet. From saving water to improving indoor air quality, even small changes can add up to big results.

For more details on water efficiency, check out the water efficiency guidance from the [Green Restaurant Association](#)

WATER SAVINGS**Fix Leaks & Upgrade Fixtures:**

Repair dripping faucets and running toilets. Install low-flow faucets, spray nozzles, showerheads, and toilets to cut water use. For larger venues, consider flow management monitoring tools.

For Hotels, offer Towel & Linen

Reuse Programs: Encourage guests to opt out of daily laundry to save water and energy.

Use high efficiency appliances and low flow faucets and water fixtures to conserve energy and water (e.g. Energy STAR).

Reuse Water Where Possible:

For large venues, consider greywater recycling for landscaping.

AIR & CHEMICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Monitor and improve indoor air quality by using air quality sensors or indoor plants to maintain a healthy environment.

Participate in the [EPA's Safer Choice program](#) and consult EPA's list for chemicals.

For more details check out guidance on [chemicals and pollution from the Green Restaurant Association](#).



6

SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATIONS



SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATIONS FOR HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

Achieving sustainability certifications can enhance your brand's reputation, demonstrate environmental commitment, and attract guests.

WHAT ARE THEY?

Sustainability certifications generally entail an external evaluation of specific standards or criteria. They are a way to demonstrate to stakeholders that your hotel or restaurant is operating responsibly. This section focuses on certifications for existing facilities (*as opposed to new builds*).

BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

Marketing Advantage: Certifications attract environmentally conscious guests. Corporate or institutional customers may request certifications when choosing venues.

Cost Savings: Sustainable practices help reduce energy and waste management expenses and can increase operational efficiency.

Regulatory Compliance: Align operations with environmental laws and regulations.

Global Recognition: Enhance credibility with internationally respected sustainability credentials.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

1. Determine which certification is appropriate to your operations. Consider your location, budget, maturity level, and timing.
2. Follow the certification process - we've highlighted a few in this section.
3. Post your certification in public areas where guests can see them, promote it on your website, and/or consider social media or other media channels.



Photo courtesy of Houston First

BELOW ARE INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC CERTIFICATIONS TO CONSIDER:

CERTIFICATION	PRIMARY FOCUS	MARKET RECOGNITION	KEY REQUIREMENTS	COST & EFFORT	BEST FIT	RESOURCE
GREEN RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION	Comprehensive restaurant sustainability, focusing on energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, safer chemicals, and sustainable food sourcing.	Includes media kits and marketing opportunities	Four certification levels available, and optional badges can be earned. Must recycle and eliminate polystyrene foam plus earn a minimum of 62 points.	Low to moderate (data and operation); get a “green score” as a baseline with a simple questionnaire	Medium to large size restaurants or chains	Dine Green
GREEN SEAL	Comprehensive hotel sustainability (energy, water, waste, cleaning, purchasing, IAQ, staff practices)	High in US, esp. corporate, government, ESG circles, online booking sites	Full sustainability audit; detailed policies, procurement, and operations; options for bronze, silver, and gold level certification	Moderate to high (operational + some capital upgrades); fees based on sales	Full-service US hotels, ESG-focused assets, government contracting	Green Seal
GREEN KEY	Hospitality-specific sustainability rating (energy, waste, water, CSR, guest engagement)	High among hotel brands, tourism boards, & online bookings; global footprint	Tiered scorecard (1–5 Keys); continuous improvement model	Moderate (low barrier to entry, scalable over time); low membership and audit fees	Chain brands, independents, flexible for all property sizes	Green Key
TRAVELIFE	Environmental & social responsibility (labor, community, supply chain, local impacts)	Strong in Europe, can be highlighted on various booking sites	Audit on social + environmental standards; community & supply chain focus	Moderate; strong on policies & stakeholder engagement; costs based on hotel size	Resorts, international leisure, those with high online travel agency bookings	Travel Life
ENERGY STAR (US EPA)	Energy efficiency & GHG performance	Very high in US (investors, city disclosures)	12 months of energy data; score ≥75 vs peers	Low to moderate (focused on data & operations); EPA Energy Star Portfolio Manager® tool to measure and track energy use, water use, and/or waste and materials	Large hotels/ motels focused on energy cost savings, ESG reporting, or asset value protection	Energy Star
U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL LEED	Green building design, construction & operations	Very high globally (developers, investors, city codes, premium assets)	Credits-based system (energy, water, materials, air, location, innovation); multiple rating levels	High (design, construction or major operational upgrades often required)	New builds, major renovations, luxury assets, trophy properties, long-term value drivers	USGBC

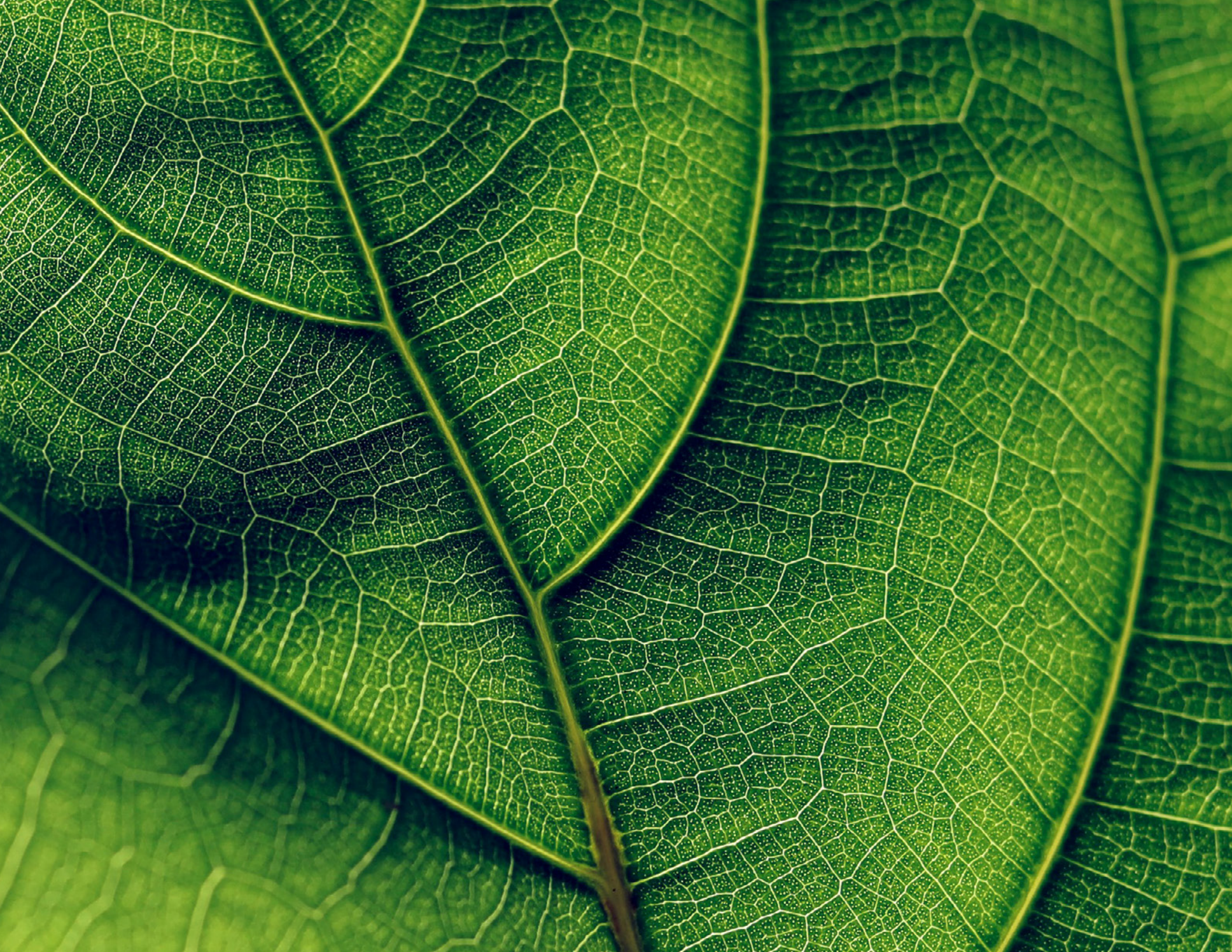
SUGGESTIONS FOR HOTELS

HOTEL TYPE	CERTIFICATION
NEW BUILD OR FULL RENOVATION	LEED + ENERGY STAR
US URBAN FULL-SERVICE HOTEL	GREEN SEAL + ENERGY STAR
BRAND-AFFILIATED HOTEL (LIMITED OR FULL-SERVICE)	GREEN KEY + ENERGY STAR
INTERNATIONAL RESORT (OTA, TOUR OPERATOR EXPOSURE)	TRAVELIFE + ENERGY STAR
OLDER PROPERTY FOCUSED ON ENERGY COST SAVINGS	ENERGY STAR ONLY





7 ADDITIONAL TOOLS



GENERAL SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKITS

Whether you're just getting started or looking to take your efforts to the next level, these toolkits and guides offer practical strategies for reducing environmental impact in hospitality settings. From water stewardship to net-zero pathways, these resources provide the frameworks, checklists, and good practices you need to make measurable progress toward your sustainability goals.

- [Dine Green](#)
- [Sustainable Restaurants Association Guide](#)
- [World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance](#)
 - [Net Zero Methodology for Hotels](#)
 - [Water Stewardship](#)
- [Sustainability Guide for the South Australian Hospitality Industry](#)

Photo courtesy of Houston First



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