

Asheville, start your fryers Blue Ridge Biofuels wants your grease

By Mackensy Lunsford
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Olufemi Lewis pours used cooking oil into recycling containers set up by Blue Ridge Biofuel for conversion to biodiesel. *Photo by Bill Sanders*

Some folks go greasy for Thanksgiving. Those deep-frying the Thanksgiving turkey have likely heard the cautionary tales. Along with the usual warnings about the perils of hot grease (fires, burns and the like), there's also the question of proper disposal.

It's enough to make one settle for a dry, oven-roasted bird instead.

But Blue Ridge Biofuels, a local company that turns spent grease into clean fuel for engines and home furnaces, knows exactly where you should put your dirty oil. It has created a website dedicated to helping the public recycle its oil (cookingoilrecycling.org), with locations of grease-disposal bins and tips for proper recycling procedures.

Blue Ridge Biofuels has close to 40 recycling bins for spent oil scattered in and around Asheville, said Melita Kyriakou, the company's business administrator. "We have them at landfills, recycle centers, at neighborhood community centers, apartment complexes — they're very accessible," she said.

Can't find a bin? Bring your oil to Blue Ridge Biofuels' facility at the Phil Mechanic Studios building at 109 Roberts St. in the River Arts District, Kyriakou said.

Other disposal locations include the recycling station behind Asheville Pizza and Brewing Co. on Merrimon Avenue. There's another behind the West Village Market on Haywood Road in West Asheville, and another at Curbside Management at 116 N. Woodfin Ave.

Kyriakou said that the warnings against improper grease disposal are far from old wives' tales.

"First of all, if people pour it down their drains, it can clog sewer pipes," she said. "And that uses up valuable public dollars to clear them. Also, backed-up sewer pipes can pollute the environment. If anyone has ever seen a backed-up sewer pipe in their neighborhood, it is really, really gross."

Backed-up sewer systems do not a happy holiday make. But warm homes do — and home heating is one of the ways in which fryer oil can be recycled.

Most people consider used oil, with its food particulates and less-than-fresh smell, to be waste material, said Kyriakou. “But it’s actually a valuable resource that we’re generating here through our holiday festivities and, through recycling it, we’re helping to create biodiesel.”

Recycling oil is a way for anyone to participate in the local fuel economy, even if you don’t own a car or furnace that can run on biodiesel, said Kyriakou.

“We live in the South, where pretty much everybody fries,” she said. “And everyone’s got a little can of grease in their house, and they can help the local economy by recycling their oil.”