

Plastic Recycling

Most household plastic bottles (with only a few exceptions) can potentially be collected for recycling. However the difficulty with recycling plastic is that the large number of polymer types make separation of items difficult and because they are light yet bulky, the weight to volume ratio becomes uneconomical to transport.

Plastic is one of the worst polluters as it doesn't easily degrade and remains in the environment for a very long time.

Plastic bags cause a great deal of problems as they are given away with just about every purchase we make. The best solution is to buy a reusable "bag for life", available at most supermarkets, you can take these with you every time you shop.

Why recycle plastics?

- Cuts waste disposal costs.
- Less waste is sent to landfill sites.
- Saves finite oil reserves.
- If plastic bags are made from recycled rather than virgin polythene energy consumption is cut by about a third.

Before you bin it:

- Wash the bottles.
- Squash them flat so they do not take up as much room.
- Look for the triangle symbol which indicates the type of plastic (see over) and check that this material is accepted.

Link:

www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/Plastics.htm

For information on plastic recycling: how, where and why.



What happens to plastic when it is recycled?

Stage 1

Plastic bottles are deposited in the recycling banks.

Stage 2

Plastic bottles are collected from the recycling banks and transported to a 'materials reclamation facility' (MRF).

Stage 3

The bottles are sorted into different types of plastic.

Stage 4

Bottles are squashed into tightly packed blocks.

Stage 5

Powerful baling machines squash the air out of the bottles to make them easier to transport.

Stage 6

The plastic is then transported to a reprocessing factory where it is granulated.

Stage 7

The granulated flakes of plastic are then made into new products such as garden furniture, fleeces, pipes and coat hangers.

Reduce and Re-use

- Buy loose fruit and vegetables to avoid polystyrene trays and polythene wrapping.
- Avoid bulky packaging made from mixed materials especially if it can't be separated or that has excess layers.
- Choose durable plastics that will last.
- Use plastic bags for bin liners or poop scoops.
- Try to buy refillable products (e.g. Ecover).
- Use mugs and glasses instead of disposable plastic or polystyrene cups.
- Buying in bulk often reduces the total amount of material used in the packaging.

Different Types of Plastic

PET

Polyethylene Terephthalate



Usually clear or green, rigid and sinks in water.

Used for fizzy drink bottles.

When recycled can be used to make egg cartons, fibre filling for sleeping bags, duvets and anoraks, industrial strapping, hard wearing wall coverings, tufting for carpets and rugs, new bottles and fleece jackets.

HDPE

High Density Polyethylene



Semi rigid and sinks in water.

Used for milk bottles and fabric conditioner bottles.

PVC

Polyvinyl Chloride



Semi rigid, glossy and sinks in water.

Used for squash and mineral water.

When recycled can be used to make drainage pipes, electrical fittings and clothing.

LDPE

Low Density Polyethylene



Flexible plastic but not crinkly.

Used for bread bags, sandwich bags and plastic ring carriers.

PP

Polypropylene



Semi rigid and low gloss.

Used for margarine tubs, straws and plastic screw top lids.

PS

Polystyrene



Brittle and glossy.

Used for Styrofoam, foam cups and take away food packaging.

OTHER

Multi-Layer Plastics



Squeezable.

Used for ketchup and syrup bottles.

Fascinating Facts

- Recycling one plastic bottle can save the same amount of energy needed to power a 60-watt light bulb for 6 hours.
- It takes about 25 recycled soft drink bottles to make one fleece jacket.
- Plastic manufacture consumes about 270 million tonnes of oil and gas every year

Links

[Recoup \(Recycling of Used Plastic Containers Ltd\)](http://www.recoup.org)

www.recoup.org

UK household plastic recycling organisation.

[Ollie Recycles Plastic](http://www.oilierecycles.com)

www.oilierecycles.com

Information on plastic recycling aimed at children.