

PLASTIC

Safe Food Campaign

What are the alternatives and what can be recycled?



Plastics are not only breaking down into microplastics, causing environmental damage for generations, but right now, in contact with your food, they may be leaching chemicals, causing health problems. Look for the numbers 1-7 in a recycling triangle at the bottom of a plastic container to identify what plastics can be recycled. **Particularly avoid numbers 3, 6 and 7.**

- Worldwide about 70% of plastics end up in the sea, micro and nanoplastics end up in food, water, soil, air and our bodies.
- **Number one thing you can do immediately is cut down on single use plastics.**
- **Most plastics are made from petrochemicals therefore linked to climate change.**
- **Plastics are especially volatile if exposed to heat; dishwashers, sun and microwaves.**

Be aware that in the future, using starch from plant materials and seaweed may not be a good use of land or natural resources, we need to limit our use of packaging and find inventive ways to conserve.

Keeping food fresh - Use glass wherever you can for food storage, go to op shops for recycling. Cover with a damp tea towel or a plate in the fridge; buy or make beeswax covers (health effects of silicone covers is undetermined and not usually recycled). Take a reusable box to buy sushi and at meat counters in supermarkets. For parties, plates and cutlery and glassware, buy cheaply secondhand at op shops. Genuine cellophane is compostable, made from plants.

Never ever burn plastic; unfortunately this is all too common a practice.

Cardboard and other plant based biodegradable packaging can be buried in the garden or weighed down under trees and shrubs to decompose, use as mulch reducing need for water. Collect small papers in a cardboard box and mulch the whole thing, worms soon come along and eat the contents.

What can be recycled in New Zealand?

No.1 can be recycled. PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate - most 2 litre or less drink bottles), RPET is made and recycled in NZ, a low risk of leaching.

No.2 can be recycled. HDPE (High Density Polyethylene -milk bottles), low leaching into food and environment. (But bottle tops can't usually be! Sustainability Trust in Wellington takes No. 2 & no.5 tops.)

No. 3 **AVOID**, PVC, (some plastic bottles, food wrappers and take away containers, children's toys, wall paint, pipes, vinyl flooring,) PVC (polyvinyl chloride or just vinyl) is a known human carcinogen and very damaging to the environment. When chlorine in PVC is produced, used or burned, the process creates dioxin, one of the most toxic hazards known to man. Phthalates are often added to PVC to make it pliable, in children's toys for example. They are unbound to the plastic so can leach out readily. Like dioxin, phthalates are a suspected endocrine or hormone disruptor. ***Some PVC food trays and containers now banned from 1 October 2022.***

No.4, LDPE cannot now be recycled. (Low Density Polyethylene – bread bags, some cling wraps)

No.5, can be recycled in some localities PP (polypropylene – containers)

No. 6 **AVOID** polystyrene cannot be recycled (PS - cups, Styrofoam products) Landfill only, toxic in contact with food. Polystyrene is a suspect carcinogen, and contains p-nonylphenol, an endocrine disruptor. Sometimes used by takeaways to keep food warm, it can take thousands of years to break down. ***PS food & drink containers now banned 1 October 2022.***

No. 7 **AVOID**, cannot be recycled, can include polycarbonate, with highly toxic BPA's .eg fillings

- Depending on your location within New Zealand, the local council by-law does allow for foil to be recycled, as long as it has been cleaned of food/grease.
- Unfortunately many “paper” food wrappings, including most teabags and coffee cups, contain a mix of paper and plastic and can't be recycled and end up in the landfill.
- Some supermarkets and The Warehouse have a soft plastic bin. See ‘soft plastic recycling’.

A UK Government paper on biodegradable packaging examines whether the standard required for all such “alternative plastics should be that they could be home composted. **Reduction is far more important than recycling**, and a fundamental shift away from all single-use packaging, plastic or otherwise, is now necessary,” the report said.

For further info:

1. Excellent NZ site: <https://therubbishtrip.co.nz/>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/standards-for-biodegradable-compostable-and-bio-based-plastics-call-for-evidence>
3. <https://www.consumer.org.nz/articles/plastic-packaging>
4. <https://www.consumer.org.nz/articles/what-you-can-and-can-t-recycle>
5. <https://www.greenlivingtips.com/articles/recycling-by-the-numbers.html>

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