<https://www.almanac.com/which-plastics-are-recyclable-number>

# set of recycling symbols for plasticWhich Plastics Are Recyclable By Number?

 Old farmer’s almanac

**Plastics Recycling Chart: Can You Recycle That?**

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What do those number symbols on plastic bottles and containers mean? (And why are they so small?!) Find out which plastics are safe, which may leak chemicals, and how to recycle plastic with this Plastics Identification Chart.

Interestingly, the number of symbols inside the triangles on plastic bottles and containers was not meant to help us identify which ones to recycle. The Society of Plastics Industry, now known as the [Plastics Industry Association](https://www.plasticsindustry.org/), started this number system to identify the plastic resin content. Maybe that’s why the numbers are so hard to see!

It gets more complicated because every local recycling facility collects different types of plastics, and you need to contact your recycling center to know which plastics get collected.

Bottom-line, there are seven types of plastics. Generally, most recyclers accept plastics #1 and #2. Plastics #3 to #6 are more difficult to recycle, and some recycling centers do not process them. Plastic #7 is even more challenging to recycle and is almost always excluded.

**Plastics Identification and Recycling Chart**

***Here are the seven standard classifications for plastics and the recycling and reuse information for each type.***

In your quest to go green, use this guide to use and sort plastic. The number, usually found with a triangle symbol on a container, indicates the type of resin used to produce the plastic. Visit [EARTH911.COM](http://www.earth911.com/) for recycling information in your state.

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| ***Plastics Identification and Recycling Chart*** |
|  | **NUMBER 1**• PETE or PET (polyethylene terephthalate)**IS USED IN:** microwavable food trays; salad dressing, soft drink, water, and juice bottles**STATUS:**hard to clean; absorbs bacteria and flavors; avoid reusing **IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:** carpet, furniture, new containers, Polar fleece |
| recycle number 2, HDPE | **NUMBER 2**• HDPE (high-density polyethylene)**IS USED IN:** household cleaner and shampoo bottles, milk jugs, yogurt tubs**STATUS:** transmits no known chemicals into food**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:**detergent bottles, fencing, floor tiles, pens |
| recycle number 3, V | **NUMBER 3**• V or PVC (vinyl)**IS USED IN:** cooking oil bottles, clear food packaging, mouthwash, bottles**STATUS:** is believed to contain phthalates that interfere with hormonal development; avoid**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:** cables, mudflaps, paneling, roadway gutters |
| recycle number 4, LDPE | **NUMBER 4** • LDPE (low-density polyethylene)**IS USED IN:** bread and shopping bags, carpet, clothing, furniture **STATUS:** transmits no known chemicals into food**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:** envelopes, floor tiles, lumber, trash-can liners |
| recycle number 5, PP | **NUMBER 5**• PP (polypropylene)**IS USED IN:**ketchup bottles, medicine and syrup bottles, drinking straws**STATUS:** transmits no known chemicals into food**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:** battery cables, brooms, ice scrapers, rakes |
|  | **NUMBER 6**• PS (polystyrene)**IS USED IN:** disposable cups and plates, egg cartons, take-out containers **STATUS:** is believed to leach styrene, a possible human carcinogen, into food; avoid**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE:** foam packaging, insulation, light switchplates, rulers |
| recycle number 7, OTHER | **NUMBER 7**• Other (miscellaneous)**IS USED IN:** 3- and 5-gallon water jugs, nylon, some food containers **STATUS:** contains bisphenol A, which has been linked to heart disease and obesity; avoid**IS RECYCLED TO MAKE**: custom-made products |

Did that chart make your eyes glaze over? To help, here is more information about the different types of plastics so you can better understand which ones are safe and which are toxic for food and drink consumption.

**#1: PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate)**

Water bottles and plastic soda bottles are the most common containers made out of PET. It’s OK to recycle.

However, avoid reusing plastic containers made of PET. Why? PET is meant for single-use applications; repeated use increases the risk of leaching and bacterial growth. Plus, it’s hard to clean or remove harmful chemicals. PET may leach carcinogens.

**#2: HDPE (High-Density Polyethylene)**

Most [milk jugs](https://www.almanac.com/winter-sowing-milk-jugs-5-easy-steps), detergent containers, and oil bottles are made from HDPE. It’s a very common plastic and one of the safest to use. It’s also fully recyclable.

**#3: PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride)**

PVC is used for plastic food wrapping because it’s soft and flexible. Most consumer recyclers will not take PVC products. Also, avoid reusing PVC products, especially when it comes to food or for children’s use. They contain toxins that leach throughout their entire life cycle.

**#4: LDPE (Low-Density Polyethylene)**

LDPE is usually what plastic bags are made from. You’ll also find LDPE in shrink wraps, dry cleaner garment bags, and other items.

Though most plastic bags are not recyclable, some companies and recycling centers have found alternatives or are investigating how to recycle plastic bags, given their harmfulness to the environment.

LDPE is reusable and safe to repurpose.

**#5: PP (Polypropylene)**

Polypropylene plastic is used in margarine and yogurt containers, potato chip bags, cereal bags, and more.

Polypropylene is recyclable, although many recyclers still don’t accept it. PP is considered safe for reuse.

**#6: PS (Polystyrene)**

Avoid polystyrene as best as possible. It’s used for disposable styrofoam drinking cups, take-out containers, packing peanuts, and more.

Polystyrene is not generally recyclable and accounts for about 35% of US landfill material. Because it breaks apart so easily, it’s often found inside marine animals’ stomachs and littering our beaches.

Avoid reusing polystyrene. Polystyrene’s chemical compounds have been linked with human health and reproductive system dysfunction. Polystyrene may leach [styrene, a possible human carcinogen](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK590797/), into food products (especially when heated in a microwave).

**#7: Polycarbonate, BPA, and Other Plastics**

Assume that nothing with the #7 number can be recycled or reused. BPA can leak chemicals. It’s an [xenoestrogen, a known endocrine disruptor.](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/endocrine)

We hope this article has helped introduce the different types of plastics. It’s undoubtedly a little more complicated than it needs to be!

**Consider this last question:**A kid buys a plastic beverage bottle. It’s tossed in the trash and buried in a landfill, where decomposing will take over 400 years. However, if that beverage bottle is recycled, it can be transformed back into the same plastic pellets used to make it in the first place.

Yes, recycling still takes some energy, but this bottle’s life is not over, and it is part of a “cycle” in which natural resources do not go to waste. Before you toss something in the trash, ask yourself: “Is this really garbage?”