

Did you know that every year we produce enough plastic film in this country to shrink-wrap Texas? Or that although Americans recycle more than 2.4 billion pounds of plastic each year, it only makes up around 27 percent of the waste stream? While plastic offers the advantages of being flexible and lightweight, it also consumes fossil resources for its manufacture and contributes waste in our environment.

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## Make Sure It's Clean!

Does that plastic lunch container still have yesterday's pizza in it? Don't recycle it until it's clean!

One dirty product, or one with food waste still in it, can contaminate an entire bale, containing thousands of pounds of collected plastics.

This can cause thousands of recyclable items to go to a landfill instead of being recycled.

Cleanliness is essential.

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## The Resin Identification Code

How can you tell what kinds of plastic to put into your recycling bin?

There's no simple answer. The equipment at processing facilities varies, so the only sure way is to check with your municipality to see which plastic items it accepts.

There are, however, general guidelines. Turn the product over and look for the recycling symbol, a triangle with a number from 1 to 7 inside. That number is the "resin identification code," or RIC. Each number represents a different type of plastic, and some numbers are easier to recycle than others.

Some municipalities accept all types of plastic. Others accept only containers with certain code numbers stamped on them

Others may accept certain code numbers generally, but not specific items. For example, a municipality may accept many items coded 1. But food take-out containers, microwaveable trays, and plastic cups may carry that code and still not be acceptable.

Still other municipalities accept only products with specific resin codes that are bottles (having a neck that's narrower than the body).

Note that the same type of product may be packaged in different types of plastic. Shampoo, for example, is commonly packaged in bottles made of Code 2 and Code 3 plastic, depending on the brand.

If you have questions about whether a plastic item is recyclable, call your municipality or local recycling center.

**To learn more about plastic codes, mouse over the symbols below.**

- **Code 1: PET or PETE**

Examples: Soft drink and water bottles. Containers for salad dressing, vegetable oil, and peanut butter. Oven-ready meal trays.

Recyclability: Widely accepted by curbside recycling programs. Please remove caps.

Note: Black microwave trays are Code 1 but may not be mixed with other Code 1s such as clear or green soda, water, or salad dressing bottles. Check with your municipality to find out if black microwave trays are accepted for recycling.

Used to make polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, and new containers.

It takes 700 years before a plastic bottle begins to decompose in a landfill.

- **Code 2: HDPE**

Examples: Milk jugs. Juice bottles. Bottles for bleach, laundry detergent, some household cleansers. Motor oil bottles. Butter, oleomargarine, and yogurt tubs. Cereal box liners.

Recyclability: Picked up through most curbside recycling programs, although most allow only those containers with necks. Please remove caps.

Used to make laundry detergent bottles, oil bottles, recycling containers, floor tile, drainage pipe, lumber, benches, doghouses, picnic tables, fencing.

- **Code 3: V or PVC**

Examples: Window cleaner and dishwashing detergent bottles. Some shampoo bottles. Cooking oil bottles. Clear food packaging. Siding. Windows. Piping, used in most blister packs.

Recyclability: Although not usually recycled at municipal facilities, Code 3 may be accepted by some plastic lumber makers.

Used to make: Decks, paneling, mud flaps, roadway gutters, flooring, cables, speed bumps, mats.

PVC is tough and weathers well, so it is commonly used for piping, siding and similar applications.

- **Code 4: LDPE**

Examples: Squeezable bottles. Bread wrappers. Frozen food bags. Dry cleaning bags. Tote bags. Clothing. Furniture. Carpeting.

Recyclability: Not often recycled through curbside programs. Call your local recycler.

Can be used to make trash-can liners and cans, compost bins, shipping envelopes, paneling, lumber, landscaping ties, floor tile.

LDPE is a flexible plastic with many applications. Historically it has not been accepted through most American curbside recycling programs, but more and more communities are starting to accept it. Check with your local community recycling program.

- Code 5: PP

Examples: Yogurt containers. Syrup bottles. Catsup bottles. Some straws. Some prescription medicine bottles.

Recyclability: May be accepted by your curbside recycling programs. Call your local recycler.

Used to make signal lights, battery cables, brooms, brushes, auto battery cases, ice scrapers, landscape borders, bicycle racks, rakes, bins, pallets, trays.

Polypropylene has a high melting point, so it is often chosen for containers that must accept hot liquid.

- Code 6: PS

Examples of polystyrene: Some over-the-counter medicine bottles. Compact disk cases. Expanded polystyrene examples include clamshell take-out containers, coffee cups, plates, and egg cartons. These are commonly referred to by the brand name Styrofoam®.

Recyclability: Polystyrene is rarely accepted in most curbside recycling programs. Please check with your municipality for specifics.

Used to make insulation, light-switch plates, egg cartons, vents, rulers, foam packing, carry-out containers.

Polystyrene can be made into rigid or foam products usually called "expanded polystyrene." It is popularly known by the trademark Styrofoam®, which should not be placed in your recycling bin. Instead, there are a number of drop-off locations for expanded polystyrene, and they can be found at [click here](#)

Each year, Americans throw away 25 billion polystyrene cups, enough to circle the Earth 436 times.

- Code 7: OTHER

Code 7 plastics may be found in three- and five-gallon water bottles. Bullet-proof materials. Sunglasses. DVDs. iPod® and computer cases. Signs and displays. Certain food containers. Nylon®.

Code 7 means that the product in question is made with a resin other than the six "coded" resins; or that it is made of more than one type of plastic.

There is very little recycling potential for most Code 7 plastics at this time.

One exception: Polyactide, made from plants, and also known as PLA, is a biodegradable packaging material derived from renewable resources such as corn starch or sugar cane. Place polyactide packaging into a municipal composter or your own backyard compost pile.

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## What's Widely Accepted?

Products labeled Code 1 and Code 2 are widely accepted at recycling facilities. Please be sure they're clean.

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## What's Less Commonly Accepted?

Municipalities often differ on whether to accept products labeled with Code 4 and Code 5.

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## What's Almost Never Accepted?

Products labeled with Code 3, 6, or 7 are less often accepted for recycling. Check with your local recycler.

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## Learn More About Recycling Plastics

Plastics come in a variety of colors and chemical formulations - all with different recycling needs.

The code number does not mean the plastic can be recycled. It is simply a way to identify the resin, or plastic, type.

Different types of plastic must not be mixed for recycling. One reason is that the different resins have different melting points.

Even a small amount of the wrong type of plastic can ruin an entire container or bale of recyclable plastic. Example: Most clear bottles are made of a Code 1 plastic, but some are made of Code 3 plastics. A single Code 3 item can ruin an entire bale of Code 1 recycling.

The only way most people can tell the difference is by checking the code number on the bottom of the bottle.

Remember to keep dirty containers out of your recycling bin. One partly-eaten pizza or leftover hamburger in a bale of plastic can spoil the whole load.

Plastic grocery and produce sacks are commonly, but not always, made from plastic types 2 or 4. These bags are often collected in barrels at grocery stores, and usually end up as plastic lumber.

PET plastic is the most common material used for single-use bottled beverages, because it is inexpensive, lightweight, unbreakable and easy to recycle.

It takes more than 1.5 million barrels of oil to produce a year's supply of water bottles. That's enough oil to fuel 100,000 cars for a year.

Some plastics cannot easily be made into other products, or doing so is not economically feasible. If your local recycler doesn't accept a particular type of plastic, it's probably because the market for that resin is small or non-existent.