

Plastic forever

Once a plastic object such as a toy or water bottle is made, it sticks around for a very long time. Plastic does not rot away, it just breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces. We have to find somewhere to put all the plastic objects we throw away.

Where does it go?

Since plastic was invented, around 9.1 billion tons (8.3 billion metric tons) have been made. A lot of this plastic goes into trash dumps called landfill sites. Only a small amount has been recycled so far.

Types of plastic

There are many types of plastic, each with different properties—from strong and hard to soft and flexible. We need to make sure we dispose of them correctly. Some plastics cannot be recycled, while others can only be recycled in centers that have the correct technology available.

Plastic bottle



Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)

This is one of the most common types of plastic used to make things. It is found in most water bottles and drink bottles. Plastic containing PET can be widely recycled but should not be reused because bacteria can start to grow on it over time. Also, chemicals from within the plastic could start to leak into the contents.

Polystyrene (PS)

This is a lightweight and easily made plastic, generally used to make disposable drinking cups, egg cartons, and foam packaging. It breaks up easily and is often blown into oceans, where it can harm marine life. Polystyrene cannot usually be recycled and we should reduce our use of it wherever possible.

Polystyrene cup



Polypropylene (PP)

This plastic is tough, light, and heat-resistant. It is used to make plastic liners found in cereal boxes, disposable diapers, yogurt containers, and chip bags. PP can sometimes be recycled but isn't accepted everywhere. To recycle items made from PP, always check if your local recycling center will accept it.

Disposable diaper



How can I help?

- Drink from a reusable water bottle instead of disposable plastic bottles.
- Use paper straws and cups, and wooden cutlery, rather than plastic.
- Take your own bag to the supermarket rather than using a new plastic one.

9% of plastic is recycled.

12% of plastic is burned.

79% of plastic is buried in landfill or dumped on land or at sea.

Around 20,000 plastic bottles are bought per second. Less than half of these are collected for recycling.