


The Plastic Decoder

[As a general rule, avoid heating plastic, even those considered safe as they can emit toxic chemicals including BPA.]

 PETE or PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate)	 HDPE (High-Density Polyethylene)	 V or PVC (Vinyl)	 LDPE (Low-Density Polyethylene)	 PP (Polypropylene)	 PS (Polystyrene, a.k.a. styrofoam)	 OTHER (Misc)
<p>Used For: Clear containers, like disposable water bottles and peanut butter containers.</p> <p>Safety Factor: Generally considered safe.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, polar fleece.</p>	<p>Used For: The opaque sister of PETE, you'll find it in bottles for cleaning products, margarine tubs, cereal box liners.</p> <p>Safety Factor: Generally considered safe.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Pens, recycling containers, picnic tables, lumber, benches, fencing, detergent bottles.</p>	<p>Used For: This is the hard, durable plastic you'll find in PVC piping—it's also in more common household items like cooking oil bottles, clear food wrap, and some toys.</p> <p>Safety Factor: It's pretty toxic, so the cling wrap you use at home is more likely made from #4, though industrial-grade wraps still come in the #3 variety.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Paneling, flooring, speed bumps, decks, roadway gutters.</p>	<p>Used For: This is malleable, making it the plastic of choice for anything squeeze-able or thin (shopping bags, bread bags).</p> <p>Safety Factor: While generally considered safe, it's very dangerous to heat or microwave it in any way.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Compost bins, paneling, trash can liners and cans, floor tiles, shipping envelopes.</p>	<p>Used For: Polypropylene is hard and easy to color—it's used in ketchup bottles, plastic furniture, individual yogurt tubs, and plastic bottle caps.</p> <p>Safety Factor: One of the safest plastics available.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Brooms, auto battery cases, bins, pallets, signal lights, ice scrapers, bicycle racks.</p>	<p>Used For: You'll still find this in egg cartons, meat trays, disposable plates, packing peanuts, and to-go containers. Only advanced recycling programs will take it, but it's important to check, because it sticks around in landfills for an eternity.</p> <p>Safety Factor: Avoid if at all possible—its toxic components are known to leach into food products.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Difficult to recycle, though becomes egg cartons, vents, foam packing, insulation.</p>	<p>Used For: #7 is the catch-all for miscellaneous plastic, and it's usually code for dangerous (many plastics in this category contain BPA). The worst offenders here are 3- and 5-gallon water jugs (the ones from the classic office water cooler), phone and computer cases, and nylon.</p> <p>Safety Factor: Avoid.</p> <p>Recycles Into: Difficult to recycle, though becomes plastic lumber and other custom products.</p>

Some Basic Tips On Reducing and Recycling

 <p>1</p> <p>Bring your own bags—but beyond that, skip bagging fruit and veggies at the grocery store when not essential.</p>	 <p>2</p> <p>Resist extraneous or unnecessary packaging, lids, straws, utensils you don't need, etc. If ordering take-out or delivery, ask them to leave out utensil packs if you have them at home.</p>	 <p>3</p> <p>Buy in bulk when you can—individually wrapped containers (especially for kids products) are a major source of landfill waste.</p>	 <p>4</p> <p>Rinse your recycling out; when the objects have too much organic matter (usually food) they are at risk of being thrown away.</p>	 <p>5</p> <p>Check local rules. Recycling facilities vary greatly in their capacity, and each one has its own specifications for what can and can't be recycled.</p>
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Recycling No-Brainers

(You'll find few, if any, limitations for the below.)

GLASS

With the notable exception of Pyrex, all glass containers can be recycled.

PLASTIC

- Water Bottles
- Laundry Detergent Bottles
- Household Cleaner Bottles
- Bleach Bottles
- Dish Soap Bottles
- Soda & Juice Bottles
- Mouthwash Bottles
- Peanut Butter Containers
- Salad Dressing Bottles
- Vegetable Oil Bottles
- Milk Jugs
- Butter & Yogurt Tubs
- Cereal Box Bags
- Deodorant Containers
- VHS & Cassette Tapes (take the film out)
- Dry Cleaning Bags (many facilities are now accepting hangers as well)

PAPER

- Mail
- Computer Paper
- Lined Paper
- Construction Paper
- Greeting Cards
- Newspaper
- Magazines
- Catalogs
- Phone Books
- Sticky Notes
- Paper Cups & Unused Paper Plates
- Receipts

CARDBOARD

- Boxes
- Cereal Boxes
- Shoe & Gift Boxes
- Toothpaste Boxes
- Cardboard Tubes
- File Folders
- Pizza Boxes (cannot be greasy)

METAL

(Check your local facility's rules about crushing cans—some prefer that you do, others prefer you don't.)

- Aluminum Cans
- Tin Cans
- Bottle Caps
- Tin Foil (clean)

Location-Specific Recyclables

Check your municipality for rules and restrictions.

NEW YORK (Department of Sanitation)

LOS ANGELES (Department of Sanitation)

SAN FRANCISCO (Recology SF)

CHICAGO (Department of Streets and Sanitation)

ATLANTA (Department of Public Works)

DC (Department of Public Works)

BOSTON (Waste Reduction Services)

DALLAS (Sanitation Services)

HOUSTON (Solid Waste Management)

SEATTLE (Public Utilities)

PORTLAND (Planning and Sustainability)

- Aluminum Cans
- Tin Cans
- Bottle Caps
- Tin Foil (clean)
- Aerosol Cans (for the most part)
- Sandwich Bags
- Tupperware
- Shampoo & Conditioner Bottles
- Cooking Oil Bottles
- Vacuum-Sealed Food Packaging
- Squeeze-able Bottles
- Frozen Food Bags
- Syrup Bottles
- Ketchup Bottles
- Plastic Caps
- Straws
- Bubble Wrap
- Disposable Cutlery
- Saran Wrap
- Medicine Bottles
- Bread Bags
- Mesh Citrus Bags
- Packing Peanuts
- Tyvek
- Paper Milk Cartons
- CDs and DVDs
- Phone and Computer Cases
- Salad Mix Bags
- Motor Oil Bottles
- Shopping Bags
- Wrapping Paper
- Plastic Clamshell Takeout Containers

Not Recyclable

- Styrofoam To-Go Containers (there are some advanced recycling centers that can take styrofoam, but few and far between)
- Used Disposable Plates & Cups
- Meat Trays
- Take-Out Containers
- CD Cases
- Sunglasses
- Nylon
- Blueprint Paper
- Cigarette Boxes
- Waxed Paper
- Laminated Paper
- Pet Food Bags
- Ceramics
- Heat-Resistant Glass (like Pyrex)
- Metal Caps & Lids
- Spray Tops From Cleaning Bottles
- Padded Mailing Envelopes

Compostable

- Egg Cartons*
- Brown Paper Bags*
- Shredded Paper*
- Newspaper*
- Paper Towels (as long as not coated in cleaning chemicals)
- Wooden Chop Sticks
- Grass Clippings
- Dry Leaves
- Green Leaves
- Tea Leaves & Bags
- Coffee Grounds & Filters
- Fruit & Vegetable Scraps
- Plant Prunings
- Crushed Eggshells

**Also recyclable in some places*

Special Treatment



TETRAPAKS, TUPPERWARE, BABY FOOD SQUEEZE PACKS, ETC.

The New Jersey based Terracycle organizes programs for hard-to-recycle items, like baby food squeeze packs, Tetra Paks, toothbrushes, wisp flossers, Tupperware, Nespresso Capsules, Scotch Tape, shoes, wine boxes, pet food bags, pens, and more. While a few of these items can be recycled curbside, their mail-in system is a great option if your municipality doesn't allow it.



WATER FILTERS

Because they're a combination of organic material and plastic, Brita filters aren't usually recyclable. Brita's partner company, Preserve, offers drop off locations where they can be picked up and recycled. Unsurprisingly, Terracycle also has a Brita filter recycling program.



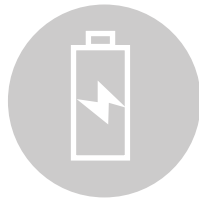
ELECTRONICS

Best Buy has drop-off centers for electronics (you can even bring them household appliances, like blenders or microwaves) in all of their stores. While they don't have recycling facilities in every store, Apple offers gift cards for some old equipment—check their website to see if your local store qualifies.



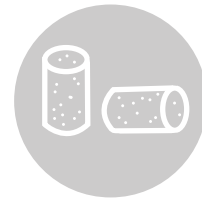
LIGHTBULBS

Compact fluorescent bulbs contain small amounts of mercury, so it's important to recycle them—if they break in the garbage can, that mercury gets released into the landfill. Many hardware stores, like Home Depot or Lowe's, offer recycling for these and other hard-to-recycle items.



BATTERIES

It's illegal in many areas to throw batteries in a landfill because of the chemicals that leach into the soil. Car batteries can be returned to any store that sells them. For small, household batteries, check your kids' school or your local library, where municipalities set up recycling boxes. And if all else fails, you can always mail them in.



WINE CORKS

You can take all wine corks to a Recork drop-off location—they'll repurpose them into items like yoga blocks and soles for shoes.