

# Where can my plastic go? (Summary)

If it is...	Kerbside recycling bin	Kerbside organics bin	Home compost	'Send-back' recovery system	Litter (Ocean)	Litter (Land)	Landfill
<b>Recyclable</b>	✓ <sup>1</sup>	✗	✗	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✗	✗	✓ <sup>3</sup>
<b>Certified Compostable</b>	✗	? <sup>4</sup>	? <sup>5</sup>	? <sup>6</sup>	~ <sup>7</sup>	✗ <sup>8</sup>	~ <sup>8</sup>
<b>Bio/degradable</b>	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	~ <sup>9</sup>

Key    ✓ Generally OK    ✓ OK though not ideal    ? Possibly (check first!)    ~ Questionable (more research needed)    ✗ Bad

## Recyclable

Whether a plastic is recyclable through your kerbside bin depends on its form and size. You should check with your local Council what is accepted in your kerbside bin, but generally:

1. Hard / rigid plastic containers and packaging (eg. plastic bottles, take-away containers, trays, etc) are recyclable through your kerbside recycling bin, as long as they are larger than a tennis ball.
2. Other hard / rigid plastic items (such as straws, disposable cutlery, coffee capsules, etc) can only be recycled through special 'send-back' systems such as Terracycle, or otherwise placed in the kerbside rubbish bin to landfill. Small soft / flexible plastics (eg. plastic bags, plastic film lids, cling wrap) can be taken to REDcycle bins in supermarkets for recycling, but cannot go in most kerbside recycling bins in Australia.
3. While putting recyclable plastic into landfill is far from ideal, there are no particular concerns with having this type of plastic in landfill over and above the general issue of waste in landfill.

## Compostable

Compostable plastic must be certified as either commercially or home compostable – otherwise it belongs in your kerbside rubbish bin to landfill. If it is certified:

4. Commercially compostable – these plastics currently cannot go in most kerbside organics bins (though there are some exceptions, particularly in SA). In general, they must be sent back through a specialist system to be composted at a commercial facility, or otherwise placed in the kerbside rubbish bin to landfill.
5. Home compostable – these plastics can be composted in healthy home or community compost bins. If no access to a compost, currently they cannot go in most kerbside organics bins (with some exceptions, particularly in SA), and so in general must be placed in the kerbside rubbish bin to landfill.
6. There are not many dedicated compostable packaging collections, though some exist. You would need to check with the individual brand if they offer such a collection.
7. There is no evidence that compostable plastics offer any benefits compared to other plastics if they reach the ocean. Emerging research has found that certain compostable plastic bags break down somewhat quicker in marine environments compared to other plastics, but it is not known if this is the same for thicker and/or rigid compostable plastic.
8. There is no evidence that compostable plastics offer any benefits compared to other plastics when littered on land or sent to landfill. In order to compost, they need certain conditions to be met including heat and oxygen which are often not present. There are also some concerns that some compostable plastics may actually give off methane in landfill if they are able to break down, due to lack of oxygen (which causes anaerobic decomposition).

## Biodegradable

While these might sound like a good environmental option, there is no regulation around the use of the term and it is often applied as greenwash. If not certified compostable, they have not been tested for whether/how well they break down into natural components. Many are traditional fossil-fuel plastic with a chemical additive that makes them break down quickly into tiny fragments of micro plastic, invisible to the eye but still in the environment.

9. The vast majority of biodegradable plastics cannot be placed in either kerbside recycling or kerbside organics bins, and should only be placed in the kerbside rubbish bin to landfill. There is no evidence that biodegradable plastics offer any benefits compared to other plastics when in landfill or littered on land or in marine environments, and in fact can cause harm, either through contaminating recyclable or compostable plastic streams or by fragmenting into microplastics that could enter soils, waterways and oceans, including when in landfills.

# Where can my plastic go? (Detailed decision guide)

If it says...	(Bio)degradable		Compostable			Recyclable		
<p><b>It might be...</b></p> <p><b>So you should...</b></p>	<p><b>Degradable</b></p> <p>The manner in which degradation will occur is unknown, as is the environment and period of time in which the plastic will degrade. It should therefore be disposed of through a Council kerbside rubbish bin to landfill.</p> <p>Always ↓</p>	<p><b>Biodegradable</b></p> <p>It may or may not be made from plant-based/renewable materials. The environment and period of time in which it will microbially degrade is not known, so it should be disposed of through a Council kerbside rubbish bin to landfill.</p> <p>Check for details of where and when will degrade ↓ If no certified details of environment / timeframe ↓</p>	<p><b>Home compostable</b></p> <p>It has been certified against an Australian or international standard as being compostable under average home composting conditions. It can be added to an effectively-operating home or community compost bin – but not a worm farm or bokashi bin. It can also be taken to any commercial composting facility willing to accept the material.</p> <p>Check for local / global standards ↓ Certification present ↓</p>	<p><b>Commercially compostable</b></p> <p>It has been certified against an Australian or international standard as being compostable in an industrial composting facility plus &gt;80% of consumers in sale area have access to a collection and recovery service. The capsule can be composted at any commercial/industrial composting facility which accepts it, if there is an available collection service.</p> <p>Check for local / global standards ↓ Check kerbside organics service accepts ↓ If standard met and kerbside accepts ↓</p>	<p><b>Drop off / send back</b></p> <p>It can be composted / recovered if dropped off / returned via a special collection system, according to the instructions. For example, Tripod plastic coffee capsules can be returned via post to be transformed into energy and fertiliser.</p> <p>Check for instructions ↓ If system exists ↓</p>	<p><b>Kerbside recyclable</b></p> <p>It can be recycled through kerbside recycling bins if it contains an Australasian Recycling Label (ARL) indicating so, or if your local Council has advised that this type of plastic item is accepted (often limited to food/drink/laundry plastic containers).</p> <p>Check for ARL ↓ Confirm meets recycling rules ↓ If yes ↓</p>	<p><b>Drop off / send back</b></p> <p>It can be recycled if returned through a dedicated drop-off or collection system. Eg. Soft, flexible plastics can be recycled through REDcycle bins at many supermarkets, while Terracycle offers a number of post-back programs for plastic items that aren't recyclable through the kerbside bin, including cosmetic containers,</p> <p>Check for ARL ↓ Check for existing collection / return system ↓ If yes ↓</p>	<p><b>Technically recyclable</b></p> <p>As no collection and/or recycling systems currently exist to recycle the plastic, it should be disposed of through Council kerbside rubbish bin to landfill. It should never be placed in kerbside recycling in the hope/wish that your Council will find a way to recycle it, as it can devalue actual recyclables.</p> <p>Always ↓</p>
<p><b>Ideal</b></p>	 Landfill	 Landfill	 Home compost	 Kerbside organics bin	 'Send-back' recovery system	 Kerbside recycling bin	 'Send-back' recovery system	 Landfill
<p><b>Else</b></p>								
<p><b>Never</b></p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin X Kerbside organics bin X Compost bin</p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin X Kerbside organics bin X Compost bin</p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin X Kerbside organics bin*</p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin X Kerbside organics bin* X Compost bin</p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin X Kerbside organics bin X Compost bin</p>		<p>X Kerbside recycling bin</p>	<p>X Kerbside recycling bin</p>

\* Certified commercial compostable coffee capsules may be recyclable in a small number of local council areas. The number may grow in the future.