

Your guide to plastic recycling in the UK

Plastics are everywhere, and while virtually all plastics can be recycled in theory, many aren't. Some plastics aren't collected by household recycling programmes, and for others the recycling process can be expensive and complex, often producing lower quality material.

From food trays and drink bottles to wrappers and pouches, our plastic waste comes in many forms. This guide helps you understand the symbols, know what your council collects, and find out where to take tricky items.

Symbol	Plastic type	Common uses	Recyclability
 PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate	Soft drink bottles, salad trays	 Widely recycled at kerbside
 HDPE	High-Density Polyethylene	Milk bottles, detergent bottles	 Widely recycled at kerbside
 PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride	Pipes, shrink wrap	 Rarely recycled – avoid where possible
 LDPE	Low-Density Polyethylene	Carrier bags, bread bags	 Recyclable at some supermarkets (check locally for kerbside)
 PP	Polypropylene	Yoghurt pots, margarine tubs	 Sometimes collected kerbside – check locally
 PS	Polystyrene	Takeaway boxes, foam packaging	 Not commonly recycled
 Other	Mixed or unknown plastics	Crisp packets, baby food pouches	 Specialist schemes. Sometimes collected kerbside (check locally)

What plastics can you recycle at home?



Yes - usually accepted

- ✓ Clear PET plastic bottles (soft drinks, squash)
- ✓ HDPE bottles (milk, shampoo, cleaning products)
- ✓ Some pots, tubs and trays (check with your local council)



No - not usually accepted but check locally

- ✗ Plastic film or bags
- ✗ Polystyrene
- ✗ Crisp packets and wrappers
- ✗ Black plastic trays (hard to detect by sorting machines)

Check your council's website to see what's collected kerbside and accepted at their HWRCs



What to do with hard-to-recycle plastics

Not all plastics belong in your recycling bin.

Some plastics can't be recycled at kerbside, but there are still options:



Soft plastics

Includes carrier bags, bread bags, and frozen food bags.

Recycle at: Major supermarkets (e.g. Tesco, Co-op, Sainsbury's). While some local authorities now accept soft plastics as part of their kerbside recycling, but not all. Please check with your local council to be sure.



Plastic film & wrappers

Crisp packets, chocolate bar wrappers, baby food pouches.

Recycle at:

- TerraCycle drop-off points (via brand-funded schemes)
- Some zero-waste stores and recycling banks



Pump dispensers and mixed materials

Hard-to-recycle due to metal springs or multilayers.

Try to separate components, but these often go to general waste.

Tips for smarter plastic recycling

- Rinse packaging to remove food residue
- Leave labels on – they'll be removed in processing
- Flatten bottles to save space
- Don't bag your recycling – place loose in the bin
- Avoid black plastic when possible – choose clear trays

Want to do more?

- ✓ Reduce plastic use by switching to refill or loose products
- ✓ Reuse plastic tubs, bags and containers
- ✓ Support brands that offer return or reuse schemes



Find out more

Visit www.recycle-more.uk or www.valpak.co.uk for more recycling tips and local guidance.

