

PLASTIC CONTAINERS BUYING GUIDE

What To Look For:

Plastics are classified by their "resin identification code"—a number from #1 to #7 that represents a different type of resin. That number is usually imprinted on the bottom of your container; flip it upside down, and you'll see a recycling triangle with the number in the middle.

Breakdown of Plastic Resin Types:

#1 Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET or PETE)

Examples: Disposable soft drink and water bottles

#2 High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)

Examples: Milk jugs, liquid detergent bottles, shampoo bottles

#3 Polyvinyl Chloride (V or PVC)

Examples: Meat wrap, cooking oil bottles, plumbing pipes

#4 Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)

Examples: Cling wrap, grocery bags, sandwich bags

#5 Polypropylene (PP)

Examples: Cloudy plastic water bottles, yogurt cups/tubs

#6 Polystyrene (PS)

Examples: Disposable coffee cups, clam-shell take-out containers

#7 Other (Plastics invented after 1987; includes polycarbonate, or PC, and polylactide, or PLA, plastics made from renewable resources as well as newer plastics labeled "BPA-Free")

Examples: Baby bottles, some reusable water bottles, stain-resistant food-storage containers

What To Buy:

#1 PET / #2 HDPE / #4 LDPE / #5 PP

These four types of plastic are your best choices. They transmit no known chemicals into your food and they're generally recyclable.

#1 PET: Fine for single use and widely accepted by municipal recyclers; avoid reusing #1 water and soda bottles, as they're hard to clean, and because plastic is porous, these bottles absorb flavors and bacteria that you can't get rid of.

PLA: Plastics made from renewable resources such as corn, potatoes and sugar cane and anything else with a high starch content; although you can't recycle these plant-based plastics, you can compost them in a municipal composter or in your backyard compost heap.

#2 HDPE: Very commonly accepted by municipal recycling programs, but you may have a more difficult time finding someone to recycle your #4 LDPE & #5 PP containers.

Plastics to Avoid:

#3 PVC: Used frequently in cling wraps for meat, PVC contains softeners called phthalates that interfere with hormonal development, and its manufacture and incineration release dioxin, a potent carcinogen and hormone disruptor.

#6 PS: Polystyrene-foam cups and clear plastic take-out containers can leach styrene, a possible human carcinogen, into food.

#7 PC: The only plastic made with bisphenol A, polycarbonate is used in baby bottles, 5-gallon water-cooler bottles and the epoxy linings

of tin food cans. Bisphenol A has been linked to a wide variety of problems such as heart disease and obesity.