

A QUICK GUIDE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS FOR PLASTIC PRODUCTS AND PACKAGING

We see the words **biodegradable**, **compostable** and **degradable** on a lot of our plastic packaging these days and it can be difficult to know what these terms mean.

This quick guide will help you to understand:

What these words mean

How these plastics affect the environment – the rivers, sea and the land

How you can dispose of them properly

So you can make an informed choice.

OUR ADVICE

The words biodegradable and degradable don't tell us exactly what happens to these products when we throw them away or how long the plastic sticks around for in our environment once we have disposed of it. So to keep things simple our advice is to avoid any plastic products or packaging only labelled as biodegradable, degradable or oxo-degradable.

Make sure compostable packaging is certified (see next page) and, if commercially compostable only, check if there are any compostable products or packaging collection services available or that there is an industrial composter in your region who is willing to accept compostable products and packaging.

Compostable, biodegradable and degradable plastic products and packaging cannot be recycled in New Zealand

For up-to-date information on which composters do accept compostable products and packaging, visit bit.ly/composting-facilities.

NON-COMPOSTABLE

Degradable

Plastics advertised as **degradable** or **oxo-degradable** are fossil-fuel based with an additive that, when exposed to oxygen and sunlight, makes them break down into smaller pieces of plastic. If left on land, in water or marine environments these plastics can break down into microplastics and enter the food chain.



LANDFILL



Any plastics advertised as degradable or oxo-degradable should be disposed of to landfill. They cannot be composted or recycled and can potentially create microplastics if littered.

Biodegradable

Plastics advertised as **biodegradable** may, in the right conditions, break down into water, carbon dioxide and biomass instead of just breaking down into smaller pieces of plastic. To be accurate a claim of biodegradability should specify the environment in which it will biodegrade, e.g., compost, as well as the maximum time required for total biodegradation to take place.

Plastic advertised as being biodegradable without specifying an environment and timeframe for biodegradation might merely be degradable or oxo-degradable and so need to be disposed of to landfill. These plastics cannot be composted or recycled and can potentially create microplastics if littered.



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COMPOSTABLE

Some plastics are **compostable**, which means they will break down into water, carbon dioxide and biomass over a comparatively short period of time if they have the right conditions (e.g. being in a compost system). Genuinely compostable products are certified to a standard to either break down in a home compost or commercial composting facilities.

Home Compostable

Look for these global standards for home compostable products to make sure the claims are true:



ARIATION OF EN 13432

If a product is certified as **home compostable**, it can be disposed of in your home composting system.



Commercially Compostable

Look for these global standards for **commercially compostable** products to make sure the claims are true:



EN 13432

If a product is certified **commercially compostable** then it can technically be composted in an industrial composting facility. However, only a limited number of industrial composters in New Zealand currently accept compostable products. For an up-to-date list of which composters accept compostable products and packaging visit bit.ly/composting-facilities.

