



Green Living Tips

Sustainable living advice. Reduce your impact on the environment

Recycling plastics – what the numbers mean + cheat sheet

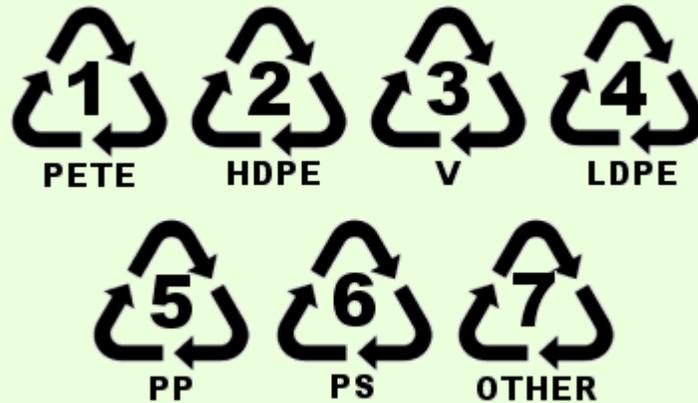
AUGUST 1, 2009 / MICHAEL BLOCH

On most plastic jars, containers and other packaging of products you buy, you'll find what's generally accepted as the recycling logo with a number in the middle and sometimes letters underneath stamped into the plastic.

The recycling logo can be a little misleading – just about anything can be recycled, but sometimes not without major effort. It's a little bit like extracting oil from under the ocean bed compared to extracting [oil from tar sands](#); none of it's really good as such, but some plastics are far, far worse than others.

The Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI) implemented the system in 1988 to allow recyclers to be able to tell the different types of plastics when sorting. Basically, the numbers in the triangle indicate the grade of plastic – the resin ID code. It's now a system that's used in many different countries.

The following is what to look for and what it all means. If you're in a rush, you might like to download my free [plastics recycling cheat sheet](#) (PDF) – it's a handy tool you can print out and pin up where you have your garbage and recycling bins – and saves you having to remember what each code signifies.



Download a free [plastics recycling cheat sheet!](#) (PDF)

A screenshot of a web interface for an online PDF converter. It features a white background with a green 'Start' button. Above the button, there are three steps: 'Step 1: Click Start', 'Step 2: Add Extension', and 'Step 3: Start Converting'. Below the button, there is a PDF icon and the text 'Online PDF Converter by Safely'. A small blue play button icon is in the top right corner of the screenshot.

1 - PETE - Polyethylene Terephthalate

The easiest of plastics to recycle. Often used for soda bottles, water bottles and many common food packages. Is recycled into bottles and polyester fibers

2 - HDPE - High density Polyethylene

Also readily recyclable – Mostly used for packaging detergents, bleach, milk containers, hair care products and motor oil. Is recycled into more bottles or bags.

3 - PVC - Polyvinyl Chloride

This stuff is everywhere – pipes, toys, furniture, packaging – you name it. Difficult to recycle and [PVC is a major environmental](#) and health threat.

4 – LDPE Low-density Polyethylene

Used for many different kinds of wrapping, grocery bags and sandwich bags and can be recycled into more of the same.

5 – PP – Polypropylene

Clothing, bottles, tubs and ropes. Can be recycled into fibers.

6 – PS – Polystyrene

Cups, foam food trays, packing peanuts. Polystyrene (also known as styrofoam) is a real problem as it's bulky yet very lightweight and that makes it difficult to recycle. For example, a carload of expanded polystyrene would weigh next to nothing so there's not a lot of materials to reclaim, particularly when you take into account the transport getting it to the point of recycling. It can however be reused. Learn more about [recycling polystyrene](#).

7 – Other

Could be a mixture of any and all of the above or plastics not readily recyclable such as polyurethane. Avoid it if you can – recyclers generally speaking don't want it.

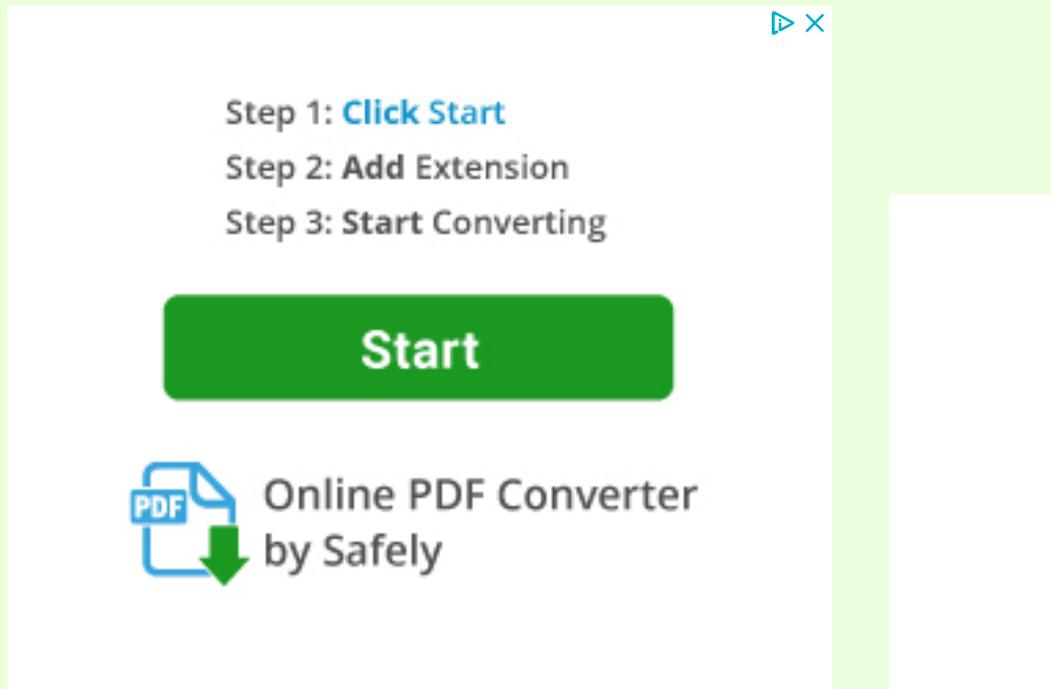
Plastics recycling cheat sheet

Download my free [plastics recycling cheat sheet](#) (PDF)! It can be used in your home or place of business to provide an at-a-glance summary of various plastics, where they are commonly used and if they can be placed in your recycle bin.

Generally speaking, plastics using resin numbers 1 and 2 can be placed in your kerbside bin, however different authorities have varying rules about the other resin numbers; so you should contact your local recycling/waste management authority for guidelines before marking the “yes” or “no” options next to the other resin codes.

For plastics not able to be placed in your recycling bin, you can add information in the “other actions” section of the cheat sheet to detail alternative arrangements you may have made for recycling these items or instructions for disposal.

For maximum visibility and convenience, cut out the plastics recycling cheat sheet and place it close to where your garbage or recycling bins are, on the bin itself or in places such as staff kitchen areas. If you have no way of recycling plastics you can't place in your recycling bin, you may just wish to cut out the first 3 columns.



Step 1: **Click Start**
Step 2: **Add Extension**
Step 3: **Start Converting**

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