

Dear Recycle Lady



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I just heard that my tea bags could be made of plastic. Can this be true? Tea Drinker

Dear Tea Drinker,

Tea bags originated over hundred years ago when New York tea merchants sent samples of their teas packed in silk bags. However, the makeup of these bags has changed considerably since then. The answer to your question depends on not only the brand of tea you are drinking, but the specialty of each brand. For example, Lipton Quality Black tea bags are made with hemp and cellulose fibers, whereas Lipton Green Decaf, Chai, and traditional tea bags (herbal) do contain some plastic. These tea bags are made with food-grade plastics and nylon, which may be listed as synthetic fibers. The plastic degrades over time, breaking into smaller and smaller pieces, sometimes 750 times smaller than the width of a human hair. Plastic-free tea bags are now available that are made from natural fibers, such as abaca plant, manilla hemp, core fiber, cornstarch, or cellulose fiber. There are several websites available with information on plastic free tea bags that list, by brand name, tea bags with and without plastic.

Dear Recycle Lady,

Last week you said that all aerosol spray cans are recycled with steel cans. I tested one of my aerosol hair spray cans and it is aluminum, not steel. Is it recycled with steel even if it is aluminum? Confused

Dear Confused,

Yes, aluminum aerosol cans are recycled with steel cans locally. The company that buys aluminum and steels cans from the Recycle Center has requested that both steel and aluminum aerosol spray cans be recycled with steel cans.

Dear Recycle Lady,

What are "Nurdles?" New Word for My Vocabulary

Dear New Word for My Vocabulary,

Nurdles are little plastic pellets that are the building blocks for virtually everything plastic. They are considered a microplastic as they are very small – less than 5mm (0.2 inch). It takes over 600 nurdles to make one small plastic disposable water bottle. When thrown away, the plastic bottle breaks up into smaller nurdles that further break down into smaller and smaller nurdles until they become a plastic soup. This soup is then digested by plankton and marine life and thus, end up in the food chain back to us. Nurdles never decompose, they just keep breaking down and releasing harmful chemicals and greenhouse gasses. Essentially made of solidified oil, nurdles are as damaging as an oil spill.

Great News: The Canadian government has announced a national ban on six single-use plastic products: plastic bags, cutlery, straws, stir sticks, ring carriers, and take-out containers. It is expected that this legislation will reduce the number of single-use plastics by 32 billion pieces annually. Not only will humans, wildlife, and marine life benefit, but plastic waste in landfills will be drastically reduced for years to come.

Have questions about recycling, or interesting information about recycling? Send questions or requests to recyclelady@greenbrier-swa.com. Dear Recycle Lady is sponsored jointly by the Greenbrier Recycling Center and Greenworks Recycling.