

Biodegradable & Compostable F.A.Q

A Guide On Biodegradable & Compostable Products.

Biodegradable OR Compostable?

■ What Is Biodegradable?

Biodegradation is a large natural process that can happen in a number of ways, including composting. Composting is very specific process that happens only in situations with the right microorganisms and environmental conditions – and it creates humus, water, and heat. Other biodegradation processes do not make humus, which is an important part of soils.

■ What Is Compostable?

If a product is compostable, it is capable of undergoing biological decomposition in a composting machine/site. After a short period of time (typically 9-12 weeks) the product will break down into compost. For an item to be 'compostable' it has certain scientific standards it must adhere to. Essentially it must be able to break down within the 12-week time frame so that it can be organically recycled together with food waste.

■ Summary

Things "biodegrade" in different ways, such as in water, with sunlight, heat, or even chemicals, but compostable products breakdown (or biodegrade) into compost through the composting process only. Most biodegradable cups are also compostable as they are made from PLA.

What Is PLA?

► What Is PLA?

PLA stands for Polylactic Acid and is made of sustainable and renewable resources such as corn starch or sugar cane. It is a natural polymer designed to substitute widely used petroleum-based plastics such as PET (polyethene terephthalate).

Polylactic Acid is made from plants, not plastic. After use, they are designed for industrial composting with food waste. Vegware, Bioware & Planet replaces conventional plastics with various plant-based materials. PLA replaces the plastic in coffee cup linings or sandwich windows, and it's the clear material in our cold cups and deli containers. Our hot cup lids and cutlery are made of a high-heat version of PLA.

Recycled sugarcane fibre is another practical material we use for our clamshells, plates and bowls. Known as bagasse, it performs really well, keeping heat in but not trapping condensation. Plus, it's renewable, a recycled by-product of the sugar industry.

If I Can't Compost, What Should I do?

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For disposal, naturally we recommend composting if it's available, but if not, please dispose of all foodservice items responsibly. Even if these items head to the landfill, this is preferred to leaving items to escape as litter into the environment. There is still an important environmental benefit to choosing Eco-Products items over traditional foam or plastic items that contain no recycled content or renewable materials.

You can also put your PLA products in a biomass boiler or on your fire. People have even started to make PLA candles.

Why Should I Use Compostable Products?

▶ Why Should I use Compostable Products?

It is widely accepted that landfill does not offer a viable long-term solution to dealing with the large amounts of waste we generate.

Using compostable catering disposables/food packaging goes a long way to addressing these issues, as it helps divert waste from already overcrowded landfills. Compostable products offer a low carbon, low impact, low waste alternative to their oil-based equivalents. [Learn more about our products.](#)

▶ How would my catering/food business benefit from switching to Glastonbury Spring Waters compostable products?

Aside from the environmental benefits, in the current climate, the business case for switching to environmentally sustainable practices cannot be underestimated. Included in the business benefits are:

- ▶ Enhanced brand perception and customer loyalty through the display of eco-responsibility.
- ▶ Differentiation from competitors.
- ▶ Increased value of product offering.

What Are Composting Conditions?

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Compostable packaging needs to be in composting conditions in order to compost. Industrial composting creates the perfect balance of microbes, moisture and warmth, so that compostable packaging can be included in food waste recycling.

Home composting conditions vary with the skill of the householder, so we don't make any claims there, but there have been successful trials using hot compost bins.

Do Compostable Products Breakdown In Landfills?

■ Do Compostable Products Breakdown In Landfills?

Compostable items are designed to be composted in a compost heap only. Composting is a very specific process which does not occur in landfills. Microorganisms, carbon, water, oxygen and nitrogen are all essential parts of the compost process and these factors need to be present in the right circumstances (such as in a compost pile) for composting to occur.

If compostable products are placed in an open landfill or dump where oxygen is available, they will decompose at a rate similar to other biodegradable materials in the same setting. If compostable products are placed in the more common anaerobic (air-locked or capped) landfill and deprived of oxygen and micro-organisms, then the ability of the compostable products to decompose will be severely restricted. This is true of all biodegradable materials placed in this setting, including paper and food waste.

As a consumer, you should be skeptical of any manufacturer making claims that their products will biodegrade quickly in an air-locked landfill. Glastonbury Spring Water intend to keep all of their customers informed and upto date with the latest news on biodegradable/compostable products.

Do Compostable Products Make Methane If They Go Into Landfills?

■ Do Compostable Products Make Methane If They Go Into Landfills?

In a capped landfill, our products and most plastics will remain stable and not be a significant contributor to methane emissions as far as we know. Most compostable bioplastics break down in aerobic composting scenarios best, and composting is not a significant source of methane. Composting is a specific aerobic (oxygen rich) process which occurs in compost piles only, not inside sealed anaerobic (oxygen deprived) landfills. Other bioplastics have shown different results in landfills, and some bioplastics are being engineered to behave differently in landfills. Glastonbury Spring Water uses PLA plastic exclusively in their compostable products, and it is tested and clearly marked for commercial compost only.

Methane in landfills results from organic materials that end up in anaerobic (air-locked or capped) landfills and are deprived of oxygen and micro-organisms. Over long periods of time, organic material slowly degrades anaerobically resulting in the creation of methane gas. Methane gas is more harmful to the atmosphere than CO₂ over its lifetime. Landfills are the second largest source of man-made methane emissions in the U.K, and much of this is attributed to the long legacy of organic matter anaerobically decomposing in the landfill and making methane gas. This is why it is more important than ever to keep as much organic matter like food scraps, yard waste, and agricultural waste out of the landfill. Plastics are generally stable in the landfill, and things like foam will stick around for a very long time – we are not sure when they will ever really break down.

The Scientific Standards

'Compostable' has a definition controlled by the scientific standards EN13432 (European Standards) & ASTM 6400 (American Standards). For something to be compostable it must have:

Biodegradability: 60 – 90% of the product must break down within a 180 day period.

Disintegration: 90% of the product must break down into tiny pieces. (2mm in size or less.)

Eco-Toxicity: When the product breaks down in a commercial composting facility it must not leave heavy metals that are toxic to the soil.

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Q. How do I know your products are 'the real deal?'

Glastonbury Spring Water work closely with their suppliers and the advertising standards agency to ensure all their products are advertised correctly so that our customers can make informed decisions.

All of our products and packaging are certified compostable, and comply with European standards.

Major Opportunity!

There's a major opportunity for change in food service recycling right now.

Compostables are the only practical solution for food-contaminated disposables. The more businesses that go compostable, the faster we can achieve this much-needed change.