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# How Long Does It Take Garbage to Decompose?

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By [Rick LeBlanc](#)

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From an environmental perspective, answer to this question of how long it takes various types of garbage to decompose is one of great importance. In fact, we should reduce consumption of products that generate waste materials that take a long time in landfills to get completely

decomposed.

Let's see how long it really takes for various wastes to decompose in landfills (based on waste category) with some relevant statistics. It should be noted that the rate of decomposition can depend upon [landfill conditions](#).

## Plastic Waste

Plastic products are very common in our modern life. According to an estimate, every year we use approximately 1.6 million barrels of oil just for producing plastic water bottles. Plastic waste is one of many types of wastes that take too long to decompose. Normally, plastic items can take up to 1000 years to decompose in landfills. But [plastic bags](#) we use in our everyday life take 10-20 years to decompose, while plastic bottles take 450 years.

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### Disposable Diapers

Just in the United States alone, every year more than 18 billion disposable diapers are thrown away. These disposable diapers take approximately 550 years to decompose in landfills, thus underscoring the efforts of programs offering [diaper and absorbent hygiene product recycling](#).

### Aluminum Cans

Every minute, every day, more than 120,000 [aluminum cans](#) are recycled only in America. But, at the same time, in every three-month period, enough aluminum cans are thrown away in America that can rebuild the entire American commercial air fleet. Aluminum cans take 80-200 years in landfills to get completely decomposed.

### Glass

Normally glass is very easy to recycle mainly for the fact that [glass](#) is made of sand. Simply breaking down glass and melting it, we can produce new glass. But the shocking fact is that if glass is thrown away in landfills, it takes million years to decompose. And according to some sources, it doesn't decompose at all.

### Paper Waste

Based on volume, paper the largest element in American landfills. Normally, it takes 2-6 weeks in landfills to get completely decomposed. But if we recycle paper items, we can easily save lot of landfill space, while reducing the energy and virgin material requirements of making non-recycled paper.

### Food Waste

By weight, [food waste](#) is the largest waste item in American landfills. The time taken for food waste decomposing depends on the type of food. Normally, an orange peel takes 6 months but an apple core or a banana peel takes around one month to decompose. An important component of food recycling is having the right container to deal with it. Read my article, [The Yuck Factor and the First 100 Yards of Food Waste Recycling](#).

### The Time Taken By Other Waste Items to Decompose

Different sources have different information on actual time various waste items take in landfills to decompose. But the numbers don't vary much.

- Cigarette Butts - 10-12 years;
- Monofilament Fishing Line - 600 years;
- Rubber-Boot Sole - 50-80 years;
- Foamed Plastic Cups - 50 years;
- Leather shoes - 25-40 years;
- Milk Cartons - 5 years;
- Plywood - 1-3 years;



- Painted board - 13 years;
- Cotton Glove - 3 months;
- Cardboard - 2 months;
- Styrofoam- It does not biodegrade;
- Nylon Fabric- 30-40 years;
- Tin can- 50 years;
- Ropes - 3-14 months;
- Waxed milk carton- 3 months;
- Aluminum cans- 200-250 years;
- Train tickets - two weeks,
- Canvas products - 1 year;
- Batteries – 100 years;
- Lumber- 10-15 years,
- Sanitary Pads - 500-800 years;
- Wool Clothing- 1-5 years;
- Tinfoil- It does not biodegrade.

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**Final Note**

The increasing waste volume is a major concern for mankind. If we do not take immediate preventive steps to keep this volume as low as possible, in near future we won't find enough space on earth to dispose of the waste stream we generate. So, the best way to deal with this is avoiding products that generate waste materials that take more than a year to decompose in landfills through proactive [design for recycling](#).

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