

DECOMPOSITION TIMES FOR COMMON LANDFILL WASTE

To be used with “How Long Does It Last?” Environmental Education Activity

Item	Time Needed to Decompose	Notes
Potato	Approximately 1 month	A potato is organic. It could decompose, or “rot,” in about a month. But there is something else you can do with food scraps like vegetables instead of putting them in the trash. Have you ever heard of composting? Composting is an easy way to turn natural waste like leaves, grass and vegetable scraps into useable material. Once the materials break down, many people use the compost in their garden. It helps the soil by making it rich and moist, which helps the flowers or vegetables planted there. So composting is a form of recycling.
Paper Lunch Bag or Newspaper	Approximately 2 months	Paper bags/newspapers are made from trees, so this also comes from something organic. So, in the right conditions, the bag could decompose in about 2 months.
Cardboard Box	Approximately 1 Year	Many people recycle cardboard boxes, and this is a great way to help protect the environment.
Waxed Cardboard Juice Container	Approximately 5 Years	Some cardboard is treated with wax like this juice carton. Because of the wax treatment, it would probably take about 5 years. In your head, add five years to your age. That’s how long this would be sitting in the landfill.
Tin Can	Approximately 50 Years	In your head, add 50 years to your age. That’s how long a tin can thrown away today will likely be sitting in the landfill.
Battery	Approximately 100 Years	Regular alkaline, manganese and carbon-zinc batteries are not considered hazardous waste and can be disposed of with ordinary trash. Other common single-use or rechargeable batteries, such as lithium and button batteries, are recyclable, but access to recycling may not be available in all locations.
Plastic Straw	Approximately 200 Years	Americans use millions of straws every day. Did you know there are reusable straws and paper straws?

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<p>Aluminum Can</p>	<p>Approximately 250 Years</p>	<p>Recycling aluminum cans saves 92% of the energy that's required to produce cans from new aluminum. Aluminum can be recycled time and time again without losing any quality.</p>
<p>6 Pack Holder</p>	<p>Approximately 450 Years</p>	<p>Most six-pack rings are made from polyethylene, which is not biodegradable. Plastic rings can trap birds, small mammals and turtles around the neck, choking them.</p>
<p>Plastic Water or Soft Drink Bottle</p>	<p>Approximately 450 Years</p>	<p>Make a pledge to use a reusable water bottle to help keep plastic out of the landfill.</p>
<p>Athletic Shoe</p>	<p>Approximately 40 to 1,000 Years</p>	<p>Most athletic shoes are made with a combination of materials. Some materials may be organic or natural, while other parts are man-made. We already know that organic materials decompose faster than man-made items, so the time it takes the athletic shoe to decompose varies. Some parts, like a leather upper or cotton shoelaces, are made from natural materials and could decompose in around 40 years. The man-made sole could take up to 1,000 years.</p>
<p>Plastic Grocery Bag</p>	<p>Approximately 500 to 1,000 Years, depending upon the amount of sunlight available.</p>	<p>Wow! That's a long time. The reason why is because most common types of plastic shopping bags are made of polyethylene, which is a man-made polymer that doesn't decompose. Instead, they go through a much longer process called photodegradation, where they become brittle and start to crack and shred after being exposed to the ultraviolet rays that come from the sun over a long period of time. So, think about this. If these bags are at the bottom of a pile and no sunlight can get to them, they won't break down. Some states have laws that ban the use/distribution of plastic bags.</p>

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Tires	Approximately 2000 Years	Almost 250 million tires are discarded every year in the U.S., and only 7% are recycled. The WV DEP hosts numerous free tire collection events across the state each year.
Glass Jar	Approximately 1 Million Years	Since it breaks so easily, people tend to think glass decomposes quickly. But it's one of the most durable materials on Earth in terms of decomposition. Relics from the earliest days of glass-making in 2000 B.C. Egypt still exist, and experts estimate that a glass jar or bottle would take 1 million years or more to fully decompose on its own.
Styrofoam Egg Carton or Take Out Container	Never	Avoid this type of packaging whenever possible.