

# Plastics 101

from "Nantucket on the Green" pg. 148

Plastics are classified by their "resin identification code", a number from to **#1** to **#7** that represents a different type of resin. That number is usually imprinted on the bottom of your container; flip it upside down, and you'll see a recycling triangle with the number in the middle.

## Here's a quick breakdown of plastic resin types:

**#1** polyethylene terephthalate (PET or PETE) Examples: Disposable soft drink and water bottles

**#2** high density polyethylene (HDPE)/ Examples: Milk jugs, Liquid detergent bottles, shampoo bottles

**#3** polyvinyl chloride (V or PVC) Examples: Meat wrap, cooking oil bottles, plumbing pipes

**#4** low density polyethylene (LDPE) Examples: Cling wrap, grocery bags, sandwich bags

**#5** polypropylene (PP) Examples: Cloudy plastic water bottles, yogurt cups/tubs

**#6** polystyrene (PS) Examples: Disposable coffee cups, clam-shell take-out containers

**#7** other (plastics invented after 1987; includes polycarbonate, or PC, and polylactide, or PLA, plastics made from renewable resources as well as newer plastics labeled "BPA-Free")  
Examples: Baby bottles, some reusable water bottles, stain-resistant food-storage containers

## What To Buy:

**#2 HDPE, #4 LDPE and #5 PP:** These three types of plastic are your best choices. They transmit no known chemicals into your food and they're generally recyclable; **#2** is very commonly accepted by municipal recycling programs, but you may have a more difficult time finding someone to recycle your **#4** and **#5** containers.

**#1 PET:** Fine for single use and widely accepted by municipal recyclers; avoid reusing water and soda bottles, as they're hard to clean, and because plastic is porous, these bottles absorb flavors and bacteria that you can't get rid of.

**PLA:** plastics made from renewable resources such as corn, potatoes and sugar cane and anything else with a high starch content; although you can't recycle these plant-based plastics, you can compost them in a municipal composter or in your backyard compost heap.

## Plastics to Avoid:

**#3 PVC:** Used frequently in cling wraps for meat, PVC contains softeners called phthalates that interfere with hormonal development, and its manufacture and incineration release dioxin, a potent carcinogen and hormone disruptor.

**#6 PS:** Polystyrene-foam cups and clear plastic take-out containers can leach styrene, a possible human carcinogen, into food.

**#7 PC:** The only plastic made with bisphenol A, polycarbonate is used in baby bottles, 5-gallon water-cooler bottles and the epoxy linings of tin food cans. Bisphenol A has been linked to a wide variety of problems such as heart disease and obesity.