

Lesson 5: Resource Sheet 1

Breakdown rates

Material	Origin	Every Day Items To Provide	Breakdown Rate*
Organics (Food & fibres)	Grown from the earth Natural fibres (for example, cotton and wool). Cotton grows on plants and is farmed. Wool from sheep For synthetic fibres (for example, polyester and nylon) see Plastics	Food: Orange, apple or banana peel Fibre: Cotton shirt, woollen socks	Two months to two years Six months to five years Synthetic fibres same as plastic rate
Paper	Made from trees and other fibres such as sugar cane	Paper, cardboard boxes, newspapers, egg cartons	Two –six months if wet (or much longer if dry). Can be recycled
Wood	Grown in natural forests and commercial plantations	Wooden ruler, desk	One–five years
Metal	Ore mined from the ground. For example, bauxite to make aluminium, iron ore to make steel	Aluminium can Tin can	50–500 years
Plastics (all kinds), synthetic fabrics	Non-renewable oil	PET bottle, polar fleece	Hundreds of years
Glass	Sand, soda and limestone	Glass bottle	Forever
Mixed materials	Combination of man-made materials such as plastic, glass and metal	Computer, poppers, umbrella	Forever/variable

*Breakdown rate depends on the conditions – air, light, moisture and presence of microbes.