

Fantastic Plastic? Activity Sheet

We all use things that are made out of plastic every day, the milk for our cereal comes out of a plastic bottle, our toothpaste comes out of a plastic tube, our shoes have rubber soles, and our food is wrapped in plastic to keep it fresh.

Think about why plastic is such a great material to use and the many ways in which we use it, and write your ideas below:

Plastic is fantastic because...

You might have written that plastic is fantastic because it keeps our food fresh, it is waterproof, it lasts a long time, it is strong, or that it has many uses. All of these reasons are true, and are the reason why we produce more than 300 million tonnes of plastic per year!

One of the reasons why plastic is fantastic, is because it takes a long time to break down or to decompose.

The table on the next page shows some everyday items and the amount of time it takes them to decompose.

Item:	Picture:	How long it takes to decompose:
Aluminium cans		200 years
Cotton T-shirts		3 months
Plastic bags		10 – 20 years
Newspapers		6 weeks
Plastic bottles or nappies		450 years
Fruit or cardboard		2 months
Waxed cartons		2 – 5 months
Fishing line		600 years
Paper towels		2 – 4 weeks
Wet wipes		100 years

Further Activities:

1. Get a big piece of paper and using the items and their decomposition rates in the table, make a timeline to show how long it takes for each item to decompose relative to each other. You can draw a line like the one below and put items along the time line in order of how long it takes them to decompose:



2. On your timeline, circle or highlight the items containing plastic.
3. Which tends to break down first, items composed of plastic or those made of natural materials such as paper and cotton? Write your answer below.

4. Which items could be a problem if they end up in our rivers and seas? Why is this so? Write your answers below.
