BIODEGRADABLE

Avoid products simply labelled ‘Biodegradable’ or ‘Degradable’. By definition this just means that they break down in nature ‘eventually’. Biodegradable products often break down slowly, leaving smaller pieces of plastic that are easily mistaken for food in the oceans. If the products are used, they should be landfilled.

COMPOSTABLE PLA VS. PLASTIC

PLA looks like plastic, but it is made of plants (corn starch). You can identify a PLA product by looking for the printed PLA symbol on the bottom or side of the product. Before using the PLA product, check that the company uses sustainably sourced and farmed materials. Secondly, make sure you understand and communicate how to dispose of the product.

Disposal: PLA products might say 100% compostable, but they are NOT compatible with home composting, as they require higher temperatures to break down, which is only achievable in a commercial setting. They are also NOT recyclable. If you want to compost PLA, you need a service provider able to deliver these materials to a commercial composting facility in your area, and you also need to make sure the composter accepts the PLA materials you want to use. If composters won’t accept your materials, landfill the materials after use.

Instead, your club may choose to use high grade plastics: grade 1 (PET) and 2 (HDPE). These plastics are recyclable both in NZ and around the world, provided they are cleaned (rinsed well / without food residue) and placed in a contracted or council recycling bin.

PLA VS NATURAL PACKAGING OPTIONS

Organic natural packaging will have a better chance of being 100% commercially compostable (smaller amounts may also be home compostable). Natural packaging options include: sugarcane/bagasse; potato starch; wooden/bamboo and unbleached paper products.

Disposal: Natural packaging should not be a problem for a commercial composter able to accept food waste. Unlike with recyclable plastic, food residue is not a problem if you are composting the material. This makes natural packaging great for cutlery and plates. If composters can’t accept your materials, landfill the materials after use - unless it is clean paper that is able to be recycled. Please note: dirty paper will contaminate a paper recycling stream so if there is food residue put it in the bin.

Unlike PLA, which produces a water resistant layer suitable to hold liquids, natural materials cannot always provide this functionality and therefore should only be used as appropriate. PLA and natural products may also sometimes look the same. If you are struggling to differentiate, use the ‘tear test’. An organic product should tear like a piece of paper, while a PLA product will have a thin plastic film that holds it together like glue.