

# Environmental impact cards

## Instructions:

When we throw used items into the bin, some of these items break down and mix with the soil. The time it takes for an item to break down depends on what it is made of. Some materials help the soil when they break down, while others can be harmful. For example, an apple decomposes in just a few weeks and enriches the soil. In contrast, a plastic bottle can take hundreds of years to break down, leaving behind tiny harmful pieces known as microplastics.

Take out a card from the box, and place it on a continuum to show how long you think it takes to break down.





Apple core

An apple core takes only **2 weeks** to break down and releases **organic matter** into the soil, this means that it is good for the soil.



Nappy

A disposable nappy takes **30-40 years** to break down. Disposable nappies are made from wood pulp, cotton and **plastic**. This plastic causes the disposable nappy to break down slowly, and can leak some dangerous chemicals into the soil.



**Crisp packet**

A packet of crisps can be munched in a minute, but the packet takes **70-80 years** to break down.

This is because many crisp packets are made out of **“metallised” plastic film** which leaches harmful plastics into the soil.



**Tin can**

A tin can takes around **50 years** to break down.

Fortunately, tin is made of metal that can be **recycled** multiple times. This means it can be transformed into new products, making it a much better option for the environment.



## Plastic bottle

A person might take a few hours to drink a bottle of water, but the bottle takes **500 years** to break down.

Plastic bottles leach **harmful chemicals called microplastics into the soil.** This is why we should always use reusable water bottles that can last us a lifetime!



## Glass jar

A glass jar can take  
**1 to 2 million years** to break  
down! Glass can be made  
into new products through  
the **recycling** process.  
This is much better for the  
environment than throwing  
them away.



**Vape**

Even though a person might use a vape for a few weeks, it can take up to **1,000 years** to break down.

When a vape breaks down, it contributes to **plastic waste in the soil, oceans, water systems, and landfills.**

This is harmful to wildlife and ecosystems. The plastics and battery leach harmful chemicals and microplastics into the soil.



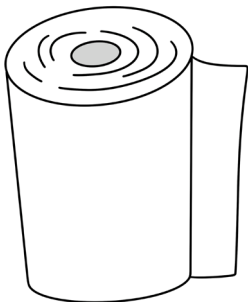
## Cigarette butt

A cigarette butt takes **5-10 years** to break down and can only break down in certain conditions because part of the cigarette is made from **plastic fibres**.



## Woollen clothing

Woollen clothing is made from **sheep fur**, and does not contain any plastics. This means it breaks down easily within **1-5 years** and is **not harmful** for the soil.



**Paper towel**

A paper towel takes about **4 weeks** to break down. This is because it is made from either recycled or pulp paper which is made from **wood**. This means it is safe to break down into the soil.



## Orange peel

An orange peel takes up to  
**2 years** to break down.

Orange peels are natural so  
benefit the soil.



## Banana peel

A banana peel takes about  
**6 weeks** to break down.  
Banana peels are natural and  
so are good for the soil.



## Aluminium drinks can

A fizzy drink can will take **200 years** to break down! This is because it is made of a metal called aluminium and is **lined with plastic**. When the can breaks down it can leak microplastics and other chemicals into the soil. This is why drinks cans should be recycled.