

Know your plastics

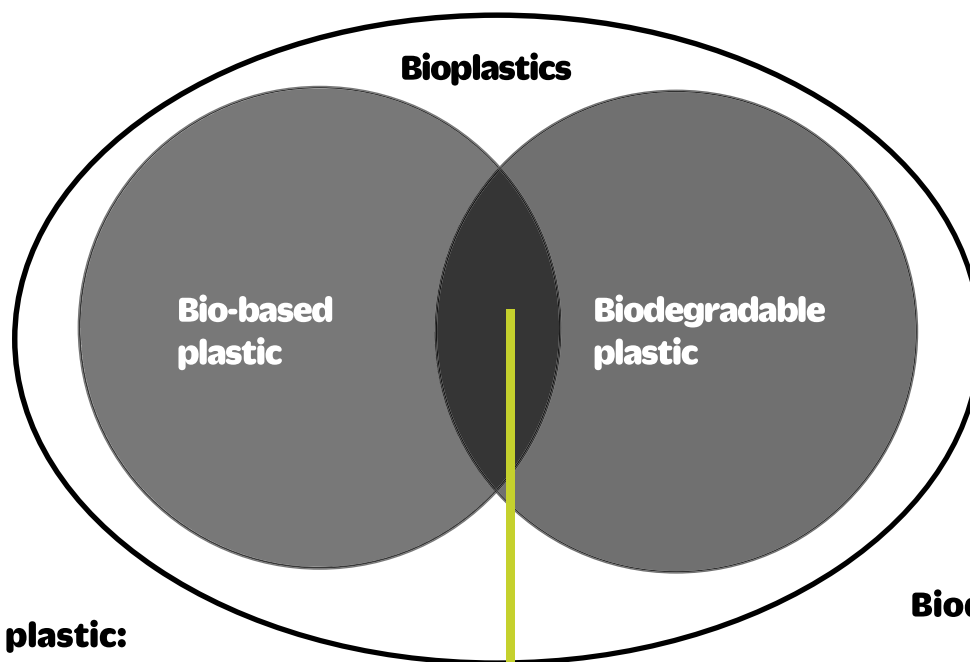
What is plastic?

The term **plastic** describes a synthetic material made from a wide range of organic polymers that can be moulded into shape while soft, and then set into a rigid or slightly elastic form (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018).

Plastic products are traditionally made from fossil fuels, such as crude oil, through a resource intensive process. Some plastics are now made from renewable materials, but these present their own challenges – outlined in the diagram below.

Bioplastics

Bioplastic is a term that can cause confusion, as it can describe two types of plastic.



Bio-based plastic:

Plastic made from natural bio-polymers - organic and renewable materials such as rice, starch, sugar cane, wheat or corn.

Some bio-based products are designed to behave like traditional plastics and do not biodegrade, having the potential to cause the same environmental harm as traditional plastics (State of Washington Department of Ecology, 2014).

Biodegradable plastic:

Plastic that has the potential to break down into its natural components over a period of time.

These products can be made from natural and/or fossil fuel-based materials (Halley and Coote, 2015).

Only some plastic products are made from plant-based resources AND biodegrade.