

Spotter's Guide to Plastic Pollution

Burnt film plastic; edges are uneven and 'stringy' from melting (plastic bag)

Foam plastic; a soft 'pellet' that bounces back when pressed with tweezers (ex. polystyrene, polyethalene)

Clear and green film plastic; bends but doesn't break, has sharp, straight edges (ex. polyethylene or polypropylene)

Green plastic fragment; hard, does not bend but flexes slightly, as hard/straight edges

Industrial production pellet ("nurdle"); spherical like a bead without a hole, 'stained' brown from being in the water for a long time



Thread plastic; thin with no cellular texture; frays are even (nylon rope)

Microbead; small, perfectly spherical, often found in groups, sometimes brightly coloured (cosmetics/toothpaste)

Green plastic fragment; a 'shaved' piece of a larger item; frays are even, shiny; piece flexes but does not break (fragments can be PET, HDPE, LDPE, PVC, PP, PS plastics or others)

Clear plastic fragment; too even to be a rock; has a duller sound than a rock when tapped

White plastic fragment; with crackle erosion pattern

Microfiber. Use a hot needle test to see if it's plastic or cotton: hold a needle under a flame, then touch it to the fiber. Melts/shrinks = plastic, burns = cotton.

Spotter's Guide to Plastic Pollution: non-plastics



Aquatic plant matter: may look like plastic when wet, but dries hard and brittle.

Plant matter: smooth edges, frays are uneven and organic-looking, cellular structure sometimes visible.

Paper: when dry, feels like paper; fibers burn instead of melt, pulls apart when wet.

Shell

Seeds and fish eye lenses: often perfectly round, but have ridges, furrows or linear marks going from pole to pole; has a different center when split open (plastics would be more uniform).

Rocks: Very smooth or light passes through unevenly; sinks in water; sounds different than plastic when tapped

Crab part: two sides are very different, organic patterns on one side.

Cotton string: Threads are tiny and uneven; burns instead of shrinks or melts with hot needle test

Shells: smooth without plastic-like facturing or grooves; pitting is regular; two sides often very different; makes a light clinking sound when tapped.

Glass: Has very straight edges; clinks like glass when tapped.