



Recycle Right

... With Packaging

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Classify different forms of packaging by the materials used and their ability to be recycled
- Draw conclusions about the benefits of packaging as well as the environmental costs
- Discuss how they can make responsible choices when buying packaged products.

Background Information

Packaging plays an important role in our food supply system. Packaging preserves food, protects it from contamination, allows easy handling and transport, prolongs shelf life and maintains freshness and quality. Packaging and food preservation allows many people to enjoy a greater diversity of food products than ever before.

Food packaging has an environmental benefit as it can help prevent food spoilage – but it also has environmental costs. These environmental costs include the energy and water used in extracting and transporting the natural resources, manufacturing the packaging product and finally recycling or disposing of the packaging.

Food packaging has increased for many reasons over the past decades, including increased demand for convenience/pre-prepared foods, long-distance transportation of food and ease of handling at the point of sale.

There are a number of ways we can reduce the environmental impact of our packaging whilst still enjoying good quality products. We can choose

products that have minimal packaging, and packaging that is recyclable, biodegradable and/or made from renewable sources. Some people avoid or reduce the need for packaging by buying their food from local farmers markets or cooperatives or even growing their own. By reducing our packaging consumption, we conserve energy, water, forests, minerals and landfill space, and avoid greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Introduction

In this lesson students will discuss the social and environmental benefits and costs of packaging.

Duration

This activity may require two or three lesson periods to complete: one for the packaging study and materials research, and at least one more for the group presentations and class discussion. Alternatively, the packaging study could be allocated as homework.

Materials

- Supermarket catalogues – ask students to collect these for a few weeks before the lesson.
- Internet access, or access to information about packaging materials such as Planet Ark's Recycle Right Factsheets about aluminium, milk and juice cartons, glass, paper and cardboard, plastic bags and steel.
- One copy per student of the activity sheet in this lesson plan.



Activities

1. Packaging study

Individually or in groups, ask students to complete the packaging table in Section A of the activity sheet in this lesson plan, using the supermarket catalogues to help them identify types of packaging for different food items and products.

2. Class research

- Split the class into six groups and allocate a material to each group: aluminium, glass, paper and cardboard, plastic, polystyrene and steel.
- Ask each group to research their material to find out whether it is biodegradable, recyclable or renewable (or none of these).
- If a material is recyclable, the group should identify how to recycle it correctly e.g. can it be placed in the local council's kerbside recycling bins, or must it go through an alternative recycling collection program? For information on whether items are accepted for recycling by your local council, or to identify alternative recycling options, search on RecyclingNearYou.com.au. Each group should also describe the basic steps in the recycling process. For information about the recycling process, consult Planet Ark's Recycle Right factsheets or other suitable sources.

3. Group presentations

Each group presents their research to the class. The class should now be able to complete Section B of the activity sheet.

4. Class discussion

Discuss the social and environmental benefits and costs of packaging as a class, using the questions in Section C of the activity sheet as a guide.



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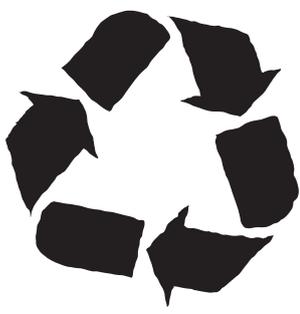


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... With Packaging Activity Sheet

Name _____ Date _____

Section A: Packaging Study

For each of the products in the table, identify how they are packaged and place a tick (Yes) or a cross (No) in the columns. Some products may be available in more than one type of packaging.

PACKAGING	meat 	milk 	juice 	soft drink 	milk shake 	cereal 	vegies 	fruit 	ice cream 	takeaway meal 
Aluminium										
Cardboard										
Carton										
Paper										
Glass										
Plastic										
Plastic film or bag										
Polystyrene										
Steel										

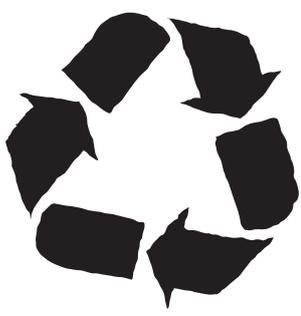
Section B: Properties of Packaging

Identify any of the packaging materials in the table that are:

Biodegradable: _____

Recyclable: _____

Renewable: _____



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Section C: Discussion

1. Is packaging necessary? Give reasons.

2. What are the environmental costs of packaging? Be as specific as possible.

3. Which type(s) of packaging do you think is/are the most environmentally-friendly? Give reasons.

4. Are there situations where you could avoid packaging or choose packaging options that are more environmentally-friendly? Give some examples.

5. Do you think that you can influence a manufacturer's choice of packaging? Yes No

If Yes, how would you do this?

If you don't think you can, why not?
