Compostable Tea Bags: The Confusing Truth

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Compostable tea bags, in summary:** Many "biodegradable" bags still contain plastic and will not home compost. The guide to what is really compostable and how to actually check.

Compostable tea bags are surrounded by confusing labels and quiet plastic. Here is the practical truth. This sits in the ethics cluster beside plastic in tea bags.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.

The hidden plastic problem

Many traditional bags use a small amount of polypropylene to heat seal them, so they do not fully break down and shed microplastics, the core issue this whole topic exists for.

"Biodegradable" is not "compostable"

The words are not interchangeable. "Biodegradable" can be vague; "compostable" should mean it breaks down under defined conditions, and even then "industrially compostable" differs from "home compostable", see composting.

Plant based does not mean home safe

Some plant based bag materials (e.g. PLA) are compostable only in industrial facilities, not a garden heap, a common and clear point of confusion.

How to actually check

Look for explicit "plastic free" and a clear "home compostable" claim, or choose loose leaf and skip the question entirely, the cleanest answer, see loose leaf tea.

What to do with used bags

Bags that really are plastic free, and loose leaf, can go to home compost or food waste; bags you are unsure of are safer in general waste than in the compost, see plastic free tea.

The brand transparency test

Brands that are specific ("plastic free, home compostable") are more trustworthy here than vague "eco" wording; specificity is the signal again, see ethical sourcing.

In a sentence

Many bags still hide plastic; "biodegradable" is not "home compostable"; buy explicitly plastic free bags or loose leaf to actually solve it, see plastic in tea bags.

The labels, decoded, in one place

Label	What it really means
Biodegradable	vague; can mean almost nothing on its own, not the same as compostable
Compostable	breaks down under defined conditions, but "industrial" differs from "home"
Plant based (e.g. PLA)	often industrially compostable only, not in a garden heap
Plastic free, home compostable	the specific claim that actually solves it
Loose leaf	skips the bag question entirely, the cleanest answer

Want to actually buy a good one?

Now that compostable bags make sense, pick a really good tea by its cup, not by green claims on the box. The teas on this page were chosen with bag materials in mind, so start there. To see the wider range, browse tea and herbal infusions at teas.co.uk or the full tea shop. Compostable or not, the wiki rule stands: with free UK delivery over £35, judge each box on its cup and description, not its marketing, and weigh cost per cup.

Browse the tea range

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Buy on the cup, not on a compostable label. Branch out across the bag shelf once you know what you like.

More tea reading

- Plastic in tea bags
- Plastic free tea
- Composting tea
- The loose leaf reference

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

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