Can You Compost Tea Bags? The Real Answer

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Composting tea bags, in summary:** It depends on the bag: plastic free bags and loose leaf compost cleanly, but polypropylene sealed bags leave a plastic skeleton in your soil.

"Can I compost my tea bags" sounds simple and is not, because the answer depends entirely on what the bag is made of, the same sealing plastic covered in is there plastic in tea bags. This page gives the real, practical answer, completing the sustainability cluster with plastic free tea bags.

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

The core problem: the plastic does not break down

If a bag contains a polypropylene sealing layer, the paper and leaf will rot in a compost heap but the thin plastic mesh will not; it persists as a fine plastic skeleton in your soil. This is why councils and composting guidance increasingly warn against composting unknown tea bags whole, and why "I always composted my tea bags" has quietly become a microplastic source in many gardens.

Which bags you can compost

Properly plastic free bags, stitched or PLA sealed, from the brands in plastic free tea bags, are compostable, though even some PLA technically needs industrial composting to break down fully rather than a cold home heap. Fully paper, plastic free bags and, best of all, loose leaf (just the spent leaf, no bag at all) compost cleanly and are excellent for the heap, being nitrogen rich.

Which you cannot, and what to do instead

Standard sealed bags of unknown construction should not go in the compost or the food waste caddy whole. The practical workaround if you use them: split the bag, compost the leaves, bin the bag. It is fiddly, which is itself a strong argument for switching to plastic free bags or loose leaf, see loose leaf vs tea bags.

What you can and cannot compost, at a glance

Bag type	Compost?
Loose leaf (no bag)	yes, the cleanest outcome; nitrogen rich
Fully paper, plastic free, stitched	yes, composts cleanly

Bag type	Compost?
PLA sealed plant based	technically yes, but often needs industrial composting, not a cold heap
Standard polypropylene sealed	no, the plastic mesh persists as a fine skeleton in soil
Unknown construction	no, split and sort, or bin whole

Tea leaves in the garden

Spent loose leaf, and the contents of split bags, make really good garden material: a nitrogen rich addition to compost, and a mild mulch, in moderation, around acid tolerant plants. This is the cleanest outcome of all and another quiet point in favour of loose leaf, which turns the whole composting question into a non issue.

Keeping it in proportion

It is worth keeping a sense of scale. For most tea the largest environmental costs are not the few milligrams of sealing plastic but how the leaf was grown, the conditions of the people who picked it and, surprisingly often, the energy used boiling far more kettle water than the cup needs. The bag question still matters, but a credibly sourced brand, a plastic free or loose leaf format and a sensibly filled kettle deliver almost all of the available improvement.

In summary

Compost plastic free bags and loose leaf freely; never compost unknown sealed bags whole; split and sort if you must use them. As with the rest of this cluster, the one decision fix is choosing a structurally plastic free brand or loose leaf, after which the composting question simply disappears, the throughline of the best UK tea brands guide.

Make that one switch in the loose leaf range, the organic tea bag range or the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · The cup you finish, bag composted or not, is the right cup. Hold off on variety until that compost friendly cup is sorted.

Sustainability companion reading

- Is there plastic in tea bags?
- Plastic free tea bags
- Loose leaf vs tea bags

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

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/