

ARE COMPOSTABLE PLASTIC STRAWS GOOD ENOUGH?

5 simple truths about “PLA, bioplastics and earth friendly/plant based” plastic straws

1. In the normal, everyday waste stream where these straws realistically end up, “earth friendly/bioplastic” straws are exactly like regular plastic straws, meaning it is almost impossible for them to decompose or biodegrade in a landfill, or if they do it can take 1,000’s of years.
2. PLA and bioplastics can only break down when all oxygen is removed and temperatures are constantly above 140 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 10 days. There are very few places in the world that can do this and when it does break down it still leaves behind a harmful residue of “plastic soup” microparticles that pollute the environment and threaten life at the bottom of the food chain.
3. PLA straws cannot be composted in home or backyard systems and are NOT marine degradable.
4. PLA straws are not recyclable and actually contaminate the other plastics that are recyclable.
5. When these plastic straws make their way into the waterways and oceans (which they do) they become “regular” plastic, consumed by marine wildlife and fish, endangering or killing them. Humans as well are put at risk via the potentially deadly toxins that become concentrated in the seafoods we eat.

Overall conclusion: In most cases, disposing and throwing away any type of PLA, bioplastic or “plant based” plastic is just like throwing away a regular plastic straw. Not using a straw at all, or using a reusable straw such as glass, stainless steel or natural bamboo should always be the first choice, but this is not always practical. The only true environmentally responsible product for single use, disposable straws is a paper straw. And not just any paper straw, but durable ones made from responsible, sustainable and renewable resources from a trusted Made in the USA manufacturer. Additionally, straws should always be “offered” (Straws on Demand) and not “automatically” served to provide the consumer a choice.

Finally, there is the “moral” issue of these PLA/plant based straws... “Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institutes, questions the morality of turning a foodstuff into packaging when so many people in the world are hungry. Already we’re converting 12 % of the U.S. grain harvest to ethanol, how much corn do we want to convert to nonfood products?”

SOURCES:

- The Push for Bioplastics and the Myth of Biodegradability January 7, 2015 by Tom Szaky <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-1621193/The-myth-of-biodegradable-plastic-bags.html#ixzz4jc5ctEK7>
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