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# How long will trash last?

**Scientists' approximations of how long certain items remain in a recognizable condition in a landfill:** (These times will vary depending on soil and moisture conditions.)

- **banana – 3 to 4 weeks**
- **paper bag – 1 month**
- **cotton rag – 5 months**
- **wool sock – 1 year**
- **cigarette butt – 2 to 5 years**
- **leather boot – 40 to 50 years**
- **rubber sole** (of a boot) – **50 to 80 years**
- **tin can** (soup or vegetable can) – **80 to 100 years**
- **aluminum can** (soda pop can) – **200 to 500 years**
- **plastic 6-pack rings – 450 years**
- **plastic jug – 1 million years**
- **Styrofoam cup – unknown? forever?**
- **glass bottle – unknown? forever?**

Sources: <http://www.blm.gov/education/int/background/packing.htm>  
and <http://www.deq.state.or.us/wmc/solwaste/rethinkrecyc/K-3/RRK-308.pdf>

*Read what another researcher discovered:*

William Rathje is a "garbologist". He is the founder and Director of the Garbage Project, which conducts archaeological studies of modern trash. This University of Arizona professor and his students have been collecting data about solid waste since 1973. Rathje and his team found newspapers from the late 1970s that were still readable. Rathje's research also shows that for some kinds of organic garbage biodegradation (the rotting process) works for a while and then slows down or stops. For other kinds, it never starts to break down at all. Rathje and his team of garbologists plan to conduct more digs to find out why paper and other organic waste degrade slowly in landfills. "It's not a pleasant task," Rathje says, "but someone has to do it."

Source: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energyfacts/saving/recycling/solidwaste/landfiller.html>