



Materials in everyday Irish life

6th Class

Print and cut along the dashed lines. These carry the **text a group reads** — a job to do, a brief to research, or notes to identify by. Check the lesson's teacher notes for how many sets each group needs and how they are used: some lessons hand out one card per group, others sort or sequence a full set.

Glass

Source: Mainly sand, soda ash (a white powder used in glass-making) and limestone, heated until they melt, then cooled into a hard, clear solid. Ireland has a long history of glass-making (think famous crystal and bottle works). Use: Bottles, jars, windows and packaging that keeps food fresh; often washed and reused. End of life: Can be recycled again and again without losing quality if it is clean. Bottles and jars go in recycling collections or bottle banks. Broken glass is sharp and must be handled carefully. In landfill it lasts a very long time. Trade-off: Glass is heavy to transport, which uses energy, but it is excellent for recycling when people put it in the right place. ^{R_s} ^{R_s}

Wool

Source: Comes from sheep. Sheep farming is part of rural life in many parts of Ireland. When sheep are shorn properly, the fleece grows back and the animal is not harmed. Use: Jumpers, socks, blankets, carpets and sometimes building insulation because it is warm, breathable and natural. End of life: Biodegradable: it can break down in soil over time. Good wool clothes last for years if mended and washed with care. Unwanted items can often be reused, donated, or composted in the right conditions. Trade-off: Wool is renewable and natural, but sheep need land and care, and washing wool uses water and energy. ^{R_s} ^{R_s}

Peat-free compost

Source: Made from materials such as green waste from gardens and kitchens, wood fibre, or coconut fibre (coir), instead of peat dug from bogs. Peat bogs store large amounts of carbon and are homes for special plants and animals; they take a very long time to form. Choosing peat-free means more peat can stay in the bog, storing carbon and supporting wildlife. Use: Helps plants grow in pots, school gardens and allotments. End of life: Becomes part of the soil and helps new plants grow. Trade-off: Peat-free bags can cost a little more or feel different at first. Some ingredients such as coir travel a long way, so transport is a cost, but bog protection remains a clear Irish win because bogs cannot be replaced quickly. ⁸ ⁸

Bioplastics (like the plant-based fork)

Source: Plastics made partly or fully from plant materials such as corn starch or sugar cane, instead of only oil and gas (fossil fuels). Used in Ireland for some everyday packaging and cutlery even when the plants are grown elsewhere. Use: Some food packaging, cutlery, bags and similar items; can look and feel like ordinary plastic. End of life: Depends on the type. Some need industrial composting facilities (hot, specialised plants) and will not break down properly in a home compost heap or if left outdoors. Others may be recyclable only with care. Always check the label. In the wrong bin they can spoil a recycling load. Trade-off: Bioplastics can reduce reliance on fossil oil, but "plant-based" does not automatically mean the item disappears harmlessly in nature. The disposal system matters