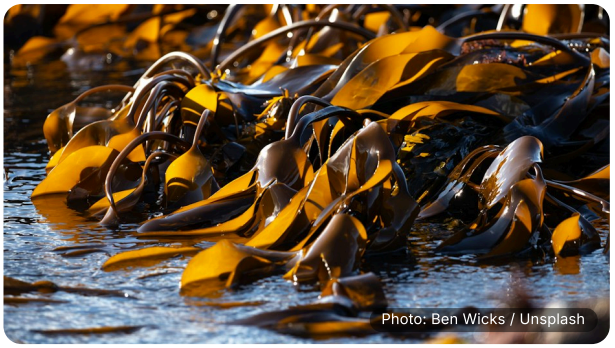
Seaweed trials point to edible packaging

LEVEL C1


Photo: Ben Wicks / Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. Where do you see the most single-use plastic in daily life?
2. What new material have you heard could replace plastic?
3. Would you try an edible cup or wrapper? Why or why not?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

edible
safe and suitable to eat

biodegradable
able to break down naturally without harming the environment

packaging
material used to wrap or contain products

pilot
a small test of an idea before a wider launch

adoption
the process of people or companies starting to use something new

reluctant
not willing or slow to do something

sustainable
using resources in a way that can continue for a long time

hurdle
a difficulty that must be overcome

III. READING

In the hamlet of Nobottle in Northamptonshire, Innocent tested a no-bottle ginger shot in edible pods made from seaweed. The pilot ran with Notpla, which produces biodegradable packaging, and about half of roughly 30 residents tried the tray samples.

The trial points to a bigger question: can seaweed help cut plastic waste? Smithers projects global packaging waste at 434.5m tonnes in 2025, rising to 525m tonnes by 2030, a 3.9% compound annual growth rate. Plastic waste doubled between 2000 and 2019. Recycling remains weak: 27.9% worldwide in 2024.

In the UK, plastic packaging recycling reached 52.5% in 2023, up from 51.4% in 2022. Analysts value edible packaging at $1.04bn in 2024, set to grow to $1.84bn by 2033.

But adoption faces hurdles: the material can be sensitive to heat and moisture in shipping and storage, and some customers are reluctant to use edible utensils. Prof James Elliott of Cambridge says manufacturers are highly price-driven in a $265bn non-biodegradable plastic market.

Notpla's pods were used at the London Marathon; Xampla wrapped a stock cube in edible film; Cupffee made an edible cup. Notpla co-founder Rodrigo García González calls seaweed sustainable: some kinds grow up to 60cm a day. Campaigners argue that cutting throwaway culture remains essential.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Eat your cup: could edible packaging help...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did Innocent test its seaweed pods?
2. What does Smithers project for packaging waste by 2030?
3. What was the worldwide plastic recycling rate in 2024?
4. Why do manufacturers resist switching, according to James Elliott?
5. Name two examples of edible packaging in the text.

V. DISCUSSION

1. Are pods and edible cups a real fix or only a small step?
2. Would concerns about hygiene stop you from eating packaging?
3. Should price or sustainability weigh more in packaging choices?
4. How could your town cut its throwaway culture?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Be to / be set to for official arrangements

Use is/are to + verb or is/are set to + verb for scheduled, announced, or officially arranged events; this is formal news style. Choose the correct be form for the subject, then add to + base verb.

"Trials **are set to expand** *in more towns."*
"A new seaweed pod **is to replace** *plastic film in tests."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

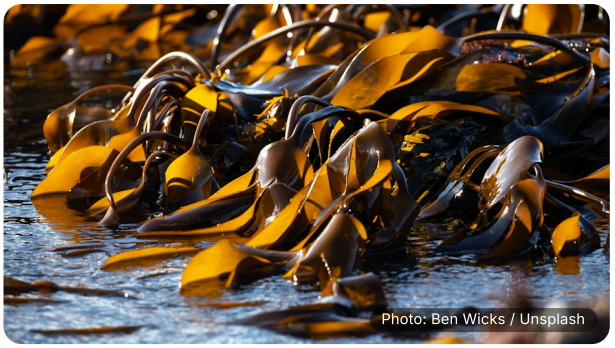
Complete each sentence with "be to" or "be set to" + verb.

1. According to the schedule, a new pilot (begin) ___ next month. _____
2. Under the plan, seaweed trays (roll out) ___ across shops. _____
3. In the published plan, pods (appear) ___ at drink stations. _____
4. From July, sandwich boxes (come with) ___ a seaweed lining. _____
5. As part of a deal, a café chain (switch) ___ to edible cups. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Ben Wicks / Unsplash

I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach place names (Nobottle, London Marathon) and company names (Notpla, Xampla, Cupffee). Check pronunciation of biodegradable and sustainable.
- Run a first skim (what, where, why), then a scan for figures (percentages, money, tonnes). For discussion, start in pairs so hesitant students can test ideas before sharing.
- Differentiation: ask stronger students to compare two solutions (edible packaging vs cutting throwaway culture) using evidence from the text; support others with sentence starters.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Take a quick show of hands, then put students in pairs to list one benefit and one limit.
2. If answers stall at “it feels strange”, prompt with safety, storage, and taste concerns.
3. Split the room into two groups; after 3 minutes, swap sides and argue the other view.
4. Elicit three local examples of single-use items, then brainstorm one action for each.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In teams, prepare and deliver a 2-minute case for or against seaweed pods in schools.

Writing: Write a 90-word press note announcing a pilot of edible pods in your town.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

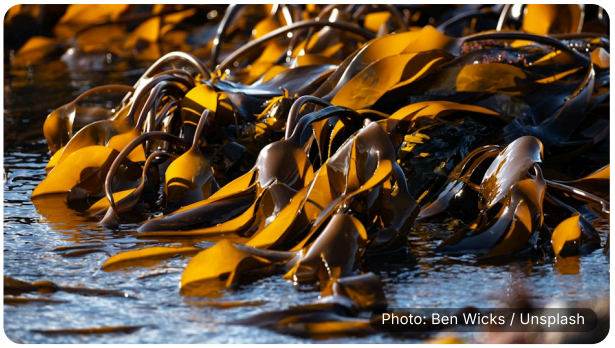
Grammar exercise: Be to / be set to for official arrangements

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Ben Wicks / Unsplash

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did Innocent test its seaweed pods?
   In Nobottle, a hamlet in Northamptonshire.
2. What does Smithers project for packaging waste by 2030?
   It is projected to reach 525m tonnes.
3. What was the worldwide plastic recycling rate in 2024?
   27.9%.
4. Why do manufacturers resist switching, according to James Elliott?
   They are highly price-driven in a $265bn non-biodegradable plastic market.
5. Name two examples of edible packaging in the text.
   Any two: the seaweed pods for Innocent's ginger shot, Notpla's pods at the London Marathon, Xampla's edible film, Cupffee's edible cup.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use is/are to + verb or is/are set to + verb for scheduled, announced, or officially arranged events; this is formal news style. Choose the correct be form for the subject, then add to + base verb. (Examples constructed.)

"Trials **are set to expand** *in more towns."*

"A new seaweed pod **is to replace** *plastic film in tests."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with "be to" or "be set to" + verb.

1. According to the schedule, a new pilot ___ next month. **is to begin / is set to begin**
2. Under the plan, seaweed trays ___ across shops. **are set to roll out / are to roll out**
3. In the published plan, pods ___ at drink stations. **are to appear / are set to appear**
4. From July, sandwich boxes ___ a seaweed lining. **are set to come with / are to come with**
5. As part of a deal, a café chain ___ to edible cups. **is set to switch / is to switch**