

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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Notes: Sources included *The Daily Telegraph*, "Drowning in Plastic," April 24; *The Los Angeles Times*, "Vast as the Ocean," April 15; *The New York Times*, "Sea of Trash," June 22, 2008; and CNN, "Garbage Island" (video). All are on the Web. Twig's Oct. 25, 2007, column also talked about it: <http://extension.osu.edu/~news/story.php?id=4352>. Wikipedia's "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" entry has a map that shows the location of the patch (if something the size of the biggest country in the European Union can be called, erm, a "patch") (yes, and Texas is a cute little dooryard) and the currents that form it.

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Q. Dear Twig: What's going on with that big pile of trash in the ocean?

A. It's called the **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**. It's in the northern part of the **Pacific Ocean**. And it's growing, or at least is way bigger than we thought it was. Scientists used to say it was as big as Texas. Texas covers about 270,000 square miles. Now they say it's **twice the size of France**, which at about 210,000 square miles times two equals some **420,000 or so square miles**.

Q. That's a lot of trash.

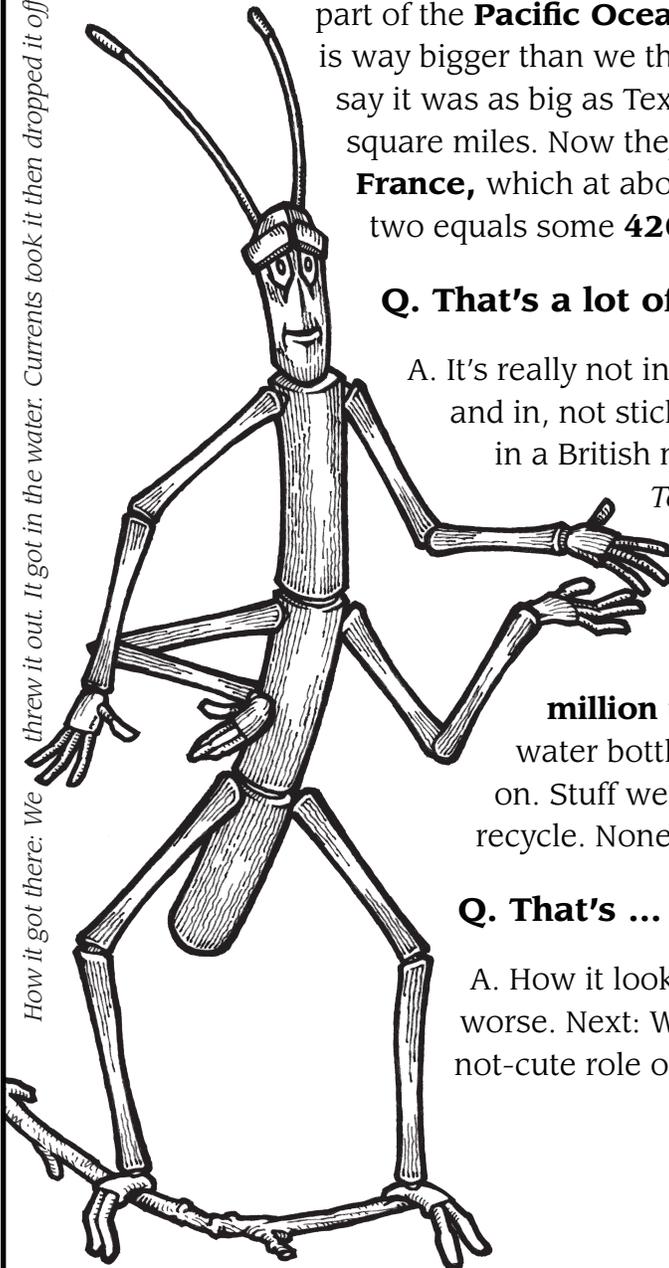
A. It's really not in a pile though. It's floating on and in, not sticking out of, the ocean. A story in a British newspaper called *The Daily Telegraph* describes it as **"a kind of marine soup whose main ingredient is plastic debris."** The story said the water there has some **100 million tons of plastic junk** in it: water bottles, soda bottles, bags and so on. Stuff we used, threw out and didn't recycle. None of it biodegradable.

Q. That's ... a lot of trash.

A. How it looks isn't pretty. What it does is worse. Next: What it does, starting with the not-cute role of the nurdle.

Twig

How it got there: We threw it out. It got in the water. Currents took it then dropped it off.



From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).