



ecology center

Strategies to Get Plastic Out of Your Life



Plastic-Free Living

1. Carry reusable shopping bags.

Use a canvas tote, backpack, messenger bag...whatever works! ChicoBags are popular because they stuff into their own attached stuff sack and are easy to remember. Reuse produce bags and mesh bags that oranges and onions come in.

2. Give up bottled water.

Tremendous resources are used to extract, bottle, and ship it. Many brands of bottled water are simply filtered tap water. Get a reusable stainless steel bottle or travel mug, fill it with tap water before leaving the house, and refill it at water fountains. Buy a sparkling water maker to make your own.

3. Buy from bulk bins.

Some grocery stores sell unpackaged food in bulk bins. Find them using zerwastehome.com/app/. Bring your own reusable cloth bags, containers, or jars to the store to avoid taking new plastic bags. Have your empty containers weighed when you first arrive, so the cashier can deduct the weight of the container when you check out. You can use your own containers for meats, cheeses, and prepared foods in many stores.

4. Shop your local farmers' market.

Farmers' markets are a great way to buy fresh, local produce without plastic, as long as you remember to bring your own bags. Normally, farmers' market produce won't have those tiny plastic stickers on them. Buy bread at the farmers' market or bakeries where bread comes in paper bags or no bag.

5. Request better packaging online.

Do this ahead of time to avoid polystyrene packing peanuts or plastic air pillows. Amazon.com has some products packaged in "Frustration-Free Packaging." Small businesses on Etsy.com are often very happy to accommodate requests for less packaging.

6. Refill office supplies.

Refill toner cartridges and pens instead of buying new ones.

7. Go plastic-free for parties.

Instead of disposable tableware, use your own dishes and wash them, or buy compostable ones. Use cloth or recycled paper napkins.

8. Look for solid or powdered cleaning & personal care products.

The Ecology Center Store carries bar soap, solid shampoo bars, powder dishwasher soap and laundry soap, soap nuts, and deodorant in plastic-free packaging. Avoid using disposable plastic razors or buying lotions and lip balms that come in plastic containers. Use a wooden-handled hairbrush.

9. Skip plastic for take-out & leftovers.

Ask take-out places to use your container instead of their disposable one, especially coffee shops. The Ecology Center Store has many reusable to-go items, such as stainless steel containers, mugs, travel utensils, and drinking straws. Use what you already have: glass jars, a fork from your kitchen wrapped in a cloth napkin, etc. Pack your lunch in a reusable lunchbox and use beeswax food wraps or metal containers.

10. Avoid single serving containers.

Choose larger sized containers, rather than single serving sizes. For example, buy a large container of yogurt and scoop it into individual bowls. Buy a large container of juice rather than single juice boxes. Avoid individually wrapped products like cheese slices. Purchase from the butcher counter to avoid shrink-wrapped meats.

11. Ditch plastic garbage bags.

If you get the wet stuff out of your trash by recycling and composting, you won't need bin liners. Collect your trash in a used paper bag, or line waste cans with old newspapers or compostable trash bags. Use your City's curbside green cart for food waste or invest in your own backyard or worm compost bin.

12. Ask your nursery if they take back plastic plant pots.

fast facts

Strategies to Get Plastic Out of Your Life (continued)

13. Try to borrow, rent, or buy used first.

Use Craigslist and tool lending libraries. Get DVDs from the library or stream movies online. Share stuff through Freecycle or barter/exchange sites. Buy used clothing, furniture, bikes, and household items. Host a clothing swap.

14. Buy in metal, glass, and wood.

Buy foods packaged in metal, glass, or ceramic crocks. Choose long-lasting metal or wood toys, stainless steel ice cube trays, metal or glass food storage containers.

Strategies sources from *Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too* by Beth Terry

Website: myplasticfreelife.com

Twitter: @PlasticfreeBeth

Facebook: facebook.com/myplasticfreelife

Connect with Bay Area people working to reduce their plastic consumption by joining the Google Group:

Plastic-Free SF Bay.

Practice mindful consumption.

Common Plastics and Reasons to Avoid Them

PLASTIC TYPE	PRODUCT EXAMPLES	ISSUES/DRAWBACKS
#1 PET or PETE Polyethylene terephthalate	Soda bottles, water bottles, clear bottles, wide-mouth containers for apple sauce, puddings, gelatin, deli takeout containers, salsa containers.	Intended for single use. Heat exposure can cause chemicals to leach out. Plastic bottles are commonly found littering beaches or floating in the ocean.
#2 HDPE High-density polyethylene	Opaque bottles and containers for milk, juice, and beverages. Opaque wide-mouth containers for yogurt, sour cream, cottage cheese, ricotta, spreadable cheeses. Detergent bottles and grocery bags.	Intended for single use. Heat exposure can cause chemicals to leach out. Grocery bags are not recyclable; they clog recycling machines. Bags and container bits make their way into the sea and the stomachs of marine mammals.
#3 PVC Polyvinyl chloride	Shrink wrap, plastic squeeze bottles, detergent and window cleaner bottles, some children's toys, shower curtains.	Often contains DEHA and phthalates, which mimic hormones and disrupt body processes. DEHA can cause harm to the liver, kidneys, and spleen. Can cause cancer, birth defects, and genetic changes.
#4 LDPE Low-density Polyethylene	Produce bags, Ziplock bags, most plastic wraps, and trash bags.	Plastic bags clog recycling machines and can be carried by wind long distances, harming land and marine animals, who mistake them for food. Even camels have been found eating bags.
#5 PP Polypropylene	Straws, plastic cups, margarine tubs, some yogurt tubs, clouded plastic containers like baby bottles.	Heat exposure can cause chemicals to leach out. Often contain antibacterial chemicals. Straws can't be recycled because of size and are likely to wash into the ocean.
#6 PS Polystyrene (aka "styrofoam")	Foam takeout containers and coffee cups. Foam meat trays, foam plates and bowls. Plastic utensils. Packing peanuts, to-go clamshells, foam egg cartons. Solo cups.	Styrene, which leaks from polystyrene, is carcinogenic and can cause dizziness, fatigue, and chromosomal and lymphatic abnormalities. Bits often found in the stomachs of marine birds. Hard to recycle.
#7 Other	Tupperware, polycarbonate water bottles, storage containers, all plastics that are not #1-6, unmarked containers and lids. Bioplastics can also fall into this category.	Items made with polycarbonate (PC) are in this category and often contain BPA, an endocrine disrupter which can stimulate certain cancers. BPA is especially dangerous to children and is often found in baby bottles. Bioplastics can contaminate typical plastics recycling streams; they require special recycling processes that are rarely available at the municipal level.

Info from: Safe Plastic Numbers Guide (BabyGreenThumb.com), Adverse Health Effects of Plastic (EcologyCenter.org), and Smart Plastics Guide (iatp.org)