

ALTERNATIVES TO SINGLE-USE ITEMS

RETHINKING DISPOSABLE HABITS FOR A GREENER FUTURE

In 1950, worldwide plastic production was at 2.3 million tons. In 1993 it was 162 million. By 2015 we hit 448 million tons of new plastic and all that old plastic never left. What can we do? About 40 percent of the over 448 million tons of plastic produced each year are single-use items. While we likely won't be able to completely quit plastic altogether, we can reduce the amount we use by opting for more reusable items and recycling as much as possible.

STORAGE BAGS

Swap disposable bags—20 million of which make their way into U.S. landfills daily—for reusable options. Silicone bags are sealable and durable enough to be freezer and dishwasher safe. Heat resistant up to 400 degrees Fahrenheit, they can be used in microwaves, ovens, and sous vide machines. There are also cloth alternatives made from canvas, cotton, and linen. Beeswax wrap is another option; made from cotton cloth lined with beeswax, tree resin, and natural oils, it uses the heat from your hands to warm and cling to dishes or itself. It can be washed and reused for up to a year and then composted. Silicone lids that suction to or stretch over



the tops of bowls and jars are another option for replacing disposable wraps.

SHOPPING BAGS

Bringing your own shopping bags reduces the number of single-use plastic and paper bags thrown in the trash. Reusable bags are also more durable than plastic, so you use fewer bags per trip. Canvas bags come in a number of sizes and styles; most can be washed and reused, and then recycled at the end of their life.

PRODUCE BAGS

Cutting out plastic bags in the produce aisle is an easy way to make a big impact. Bring reusable mesh bags and opt to pick out your own produce instead of buying it prepackaged. You'll double the environmental impact by purchasing only the amount that you need and reducing food waste. For purchases of smaller items from bulk bins, bring muslin bags or glass jars; just be sure to get assistance from a grocery employee to tare the jar before you fill it.



Left: reusable coffee filter Middle: reusable metal straw Top right: llama silicone tea infuser Bottom right: silicone lids

BEVERAGES

Globally, more than 100 billion single-use cups are disposed of each year. The U.S. alone goes through a half billion plastic straws each day! Plastic water bottles take hundreds of years to breakdown. Filter your water at home and pour it into reusable bottles. Bring your own cup to the coffee shop or make your own coffee at home. Forego the straw or opt for reusable ones made of metal, glass, or bamboo. For users of single cup coffee makers, consider getting a reusable filter

that can be cleaned and refilled. If you're a tea drinker, opt for loose leaf tea brewed in a reusable infuser over teabags.

PAPER PRODUCTS

Though more biodegradable and often easy to recycle, paper products often come at the expense of large tracts of forest and, even when replacements are planted, they take a long time to grow. Opt for cloth napkins that can be washed and reused. Bamboo or cloth "paper" towels are more durable and can be

washed and used multiple times, a much better option than the rolls we throw out after one use.

A GREENER FUTURE

While plastics tend to get all the focus, to help the environment, it's important to look at all single-use items and look for ways to reduce the amount of trash we produce. With a little planning, it is possible to replace most disposable items with durable, reusable substitutes. Every little bit helps.