

Cut your plastic consumption

For the average American, just thinking about how much plastic is consumed or purchased, as a matter of course, makes one wonder, “how can I possibly do this?”

What follows are some suggestions about how to reduce our dependence on plastic:

Step 1: Conduct an Audit

You don't know how to address an issue if you don't measure it.

You may want to conduct your audit for a day, a few days or a week. Track the plastic trash you generate—those to-go coffee cups (lined with plastic) and lids; the plastic lining of a box of cereal; plastic produce bags; soda bottles; straws; disposable razors. Some may be recyclable, you say. Recycling delays plastic's transit to landfill. It does not prevent it. Plastic, unlike metal or glass, can be recycled a limited number of times only, as the process degrades the material and results in lower quality plastic, which eventually goes to the dump.

You can jot down what you generated or save the stuff up for the week and take a picture. This audit will give you an idea of both how much plastic you consume and what kinds of products you'll need to avoid or replace.

Step 2: Say No

To eliminate your plastic, you have to learn to say “no” often. “No” to that bottle of water someone hands you automatically at a conference. “No” to all the swag at that same conference. “No straw” to servers before they can put one in your drink (some will put one in your drink...keep trying). “No” to the plastic bag the grocery store cashier puts your package-free soap into before putting that into your cloth shopping bag (jars and containers and soap can mix in there and you will not die). “No” to anything in a red Solo cup. “No” to bags of potato chips. “No” to candy bars. !!! As you continue on your quest, this step will become easier. And don't worry, going plastic-free is not an exercise in self-denial. There is a considerable amount of delicious food available that does not come packaged in plastic. (See below)

Step 3: Build Up Your Reusable Arsenal

You could spend a fortune on reusable items but you don't have to and besides, we can't shop our way out of climate change. Some of the items you'll need on your quest are:

- **Reusable cloth shopping bags.** Opt for natural fibers, not synthetic (read: plastic), which shed plastic microfibers into the ocean when you wash them.
- **Reusable cloth produce bags.** If you don't like to/want to sew these, buy them.
- **Glass jars.** You can find these at “second hand” stores if you don't have enough.
- **Something to drink out of when you're away from home.** Bring your reusable mug or water bottle.
- **Something to eat with when you're away from home.** Keep a bag handy that you've packed with utensils, a cloth napkin and a container for leftovers.
- **Other reusables.** If you need a straw, you can buy reusable metal or glass straws. Use a bamboo toothbrush and homemade toothpaste. Use non-plastic alternatives whenever possible.

Step 4: Going Shopping

You'll probably change how you shop, where you shop and what you buy, from bathroom tissue (loose rolls wrapped in paper) to bread (loose bread from a bakery or bulk flour for baking) to onions and other fresh produce (loose from the farmers market in a cloth produce bag).

Where can you buy food without all the packaging?

1. The farmers' market. During the summer hit the market for fresh fruit and vegetables with very little packaging, if any. Bring your own cartons for loose eggs.
2. In the winter, shop local grocers and try to use bulk bins (there are some great ones at Bellevue Atkinsons) and as much local food as possible. Fill up on staples at the bulk bins— flour, sugar, nuts, dried fruit, beans, rice, popcorn, oils, nut butters, baking soda, maple syrup, olives, spices, tea and so on. In the summer try to grow your own food to supplement.

Step 5: Go Your First Day Without Eating Food Packaged in Plastic

You've figured out where the plastic has been coming from, you've learned to say no and refuse plastic, you've armed yourself with your reusables and you've found the stores and markets to shop in. Now it's time to eat plastic-free for the entire day. Meal planning for your day will help prevent plastic snafus.

Step 6: Replace Personal Care Products

- **Toothpaste:** Try [homemade toothpaste](#) or Baking soda?
- **Deodorant:** Try [homemade deodorant](#).
- **Shampoo:** Use a shampoo bar, followed by a vinegar rinse. Or wash with baking soda, followed by a vinegar rinse. If you really don't like how those leave your hair, you may be able to buy shampoo and conditioner in bulk. (**Roots Market**, 3308 West Chinden Blvd., Garden City, Idaho, 83714. (208) 371-2187)
- **Facial wash:** Wash your face with water. (see below)
- **Moisturizer:** Dab on a bit of good olive oil anywhere you need some moisture and/or rub olive oil or coconut oil into your hands.
- **Hair dye:** Don't.
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Bonus Step 7: Reward Yourself

Don't skip this step or beat yourself up if you fall short. You will fall short. Reward yourself for your efforts. Every step to reduce our plastic consumption is a good step. Have a cookie at the local café where you now take your own mug. Or sit down to a movie you've wanted to watch, and enjoy it along with a giant bowl of stove-top popcorn.

Adapted from: **Zero-Waste Chef**

Blog link: <https://zerowastechef.com/2017/12/31/go-plastic-free-in-2018-or-close-to-it/>