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# PLASTIC POLLUTION

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Around the world, people throw away roughly four million tons of trash every day—that's enough to fill 350,000 garbage trucks or 10 Empire State Buildings. About 12.8 percent of that waste is plastic, which causes [big problems for wildlife](#): some animals mistake plastic for food, while others can become entangled in the trash.

### Follow these tips to reduce your plastic waste!

- Don't use face wash or toothpaste with microbeads. These tiny plastic beads go down the drain, eventually making their way to rivers, lakes, and the ocean at a rate of eight trillion a day in the United States. Because these toxic beads look a lot like fish food, it's not uncommon for bigger [fish](#) and [sea turtles](#) to munch on them—a dish that could be deadly.
- Say no to straws! In 2015 a viral video showed an olive ridley sea turtle in obvious discomfort as a team of experts work to dislodge something deep within its nostril. At first, they thought it was a worm. But experts were stunned to see what it really was: a plastic drinking straw.
- Instead of packing your sandwich and snacks in plastic bags, use reusable containers or cloth sacks instead. Same goes for your drink: Skip the juice boxes and opt for a refillable water bottle.
- Reduce the amount of plastic bags clogging up our trash and oceans by shopping with reusable bags instead.
- To eliminate some of the excess packaging piling up in landfills, encourage your family to shop for snacks, cereal, and pasta in the bulk section of your grocery store (if yours doesn't have any bulk items, check out a nearby natural food shop). Then, store it all in reusable glass jars.
- Pack an apple, a banana, or an orange. Fruit fills you up in a healthy way, plus there's no need for extra packaging. (Save the core, peels, and rinds for your compost bin.)

Using these tips, keep track of the trash you toss. Every week, try to throw out less and less and see how much you can minimize your waste in a month. Some people have managed to put an entire year's worth of garbage in one jar. Can you beat that?

### The Plastic Water Bottle Problem

If your family is like many in the [United States](#), unloading the week's groceries includes hauling a case or two of bottled water into

your home. On your way to a soccer game or activity, it’s easy to grab a cold one right out of the fridge, right?

But all those plastic bottles use a lot of fossil fuels and pollute the environment. In fact, Americans buy more bottled water than any other nation in the world, adding 29 billion water bottles a year to the problem. In order to make all these bottles, manufacturers use 17 million barrels of crude oil. That’s enough oil to keep a million cars going for twelve months. Imagine a water bottle filled a quarter of the way up with oil. That’s about how much oil was needed to produce the bottle.

So why don’t more people drink water straight from the kitchen faucet? Some people drink bottled water because they think it is better for them than water out of the tap, but that’s not always true. In most places in the United States, local governments make sure water from the faucet is safe. There is also growing concern that chemicals in the bottles themselves may leach into the water.

People love the convenience of bottled water. But maybe if they realized the problems it causes, they would try drinking from a glass at home or carrying water in a refillable steel container instead of plastic.

Plastic bottle recycling can help—instead of going out with the trash, plastic bottles can be turned into items like carpeting or cozy fleece clothing.

Unfortunately, for every six water bottles we use, only one makes it to the recycling bin. The rest are sent to landfills. Or, even worse, they end up as trash on the land and in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Plastic bottles take many hundreds of years to disintegrate.

Water is good for you, so keep drinking it. But think about how often you use water bottles, and see if you can make a change.

And yes, you can make a difference. Remember this: Recycling one plastic bottle can save enough energy to power a 60-watt light bulb for six hours.

*Text by Catherine Clarke Fox*



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