

Start Here

Top 3 Ways to Break Up With Plastic

- **Eat real food, not food wrapped in plastic.** Processed food, convenience food and to-go food almost always comes in plastic wrappers and containers. Real food you cook yourself does not.
- **Ban the bottle.** Stop buying water, soda, energy drinks, juice and other beverages packaged in plastic bottles.
- **Refuse single-use plastic.** Say no to plastic shopping bags; plastic straws and stir sticks; plastic utensils, plates and cups; and other disposable plastic items.

50 Ways to Get There

How to Shop

- 1. Bring your own cloth shopping bags.** Opt for natural fibers when you choose bags. Synthetic materials shed tiny plastic fibers in the washing machine. [This plastic ends up in our rivers, lakes and oceans.](#) You can buy cloth shopping bags pretty much everywhere today. You can also buy them online from stores such as [Ecobags](#) and [Life Without Plastic](#).
- 2. Bring your own cloth produce bags.** You won't want to stuff your reusable shopping bags with plastic produce and bulk bags. [I sew very simple bags.](#) They last for years. If you don't want to make your own bags, look for them at health food stores and food co-ops. You can also buy them online at [Ecobags](#), [Tiny Yellow Bungalow](#) and [Life Without Plastic](#). Again, opt for natural fibers.
- 3. Bring your own glass jars and bottles.** Get the weight on these before you fill them up at the bulk bins. At some stores, customer service will weigh them for you and mark the tare (i.e., weight) on them. Other stores set out scales and you weigh the jars yourself. The cashier will deduct the weight of the jar from the total weight of your food when checking you out so you pay for the food only.
- 4. Bring your own metal containers.** Use these lightweight containers for the deli, meat, cheese and ready-cooked food at the grocery store. Buy these online from [Life Without Plastic](#) or [LunchBots](#).
- 5. Make a shopping list and stick to it.** With a shopping list in hand, you will not only avoid all those plastic-wrapped impulse buys at the front of the checkout, you'll also know just how many bags, jars and containers you'll need to take with you shopping. A little bit of planning will help you eliminate a great deal of your waste.
- 6. Shop more frequently for less food.** If you can do this, you'll waste less food because you'll have less perishable food on hand to go bad before you can eat it.

Where to Shop

- 7. Fill up at the bulk bins.** Search for bulk stores worldwide at [zerowastehome.com/app](#) and submit stores not yet listed on this web-based app. Fill your reusable cloth bags, glass jars and other containers with staples like beans, rice, flour, oats, nuts, seeds, dried fruit and so on. Some bulk stores have an extensive selection that includes cleaning and personal care products and pet food.
- 8. Hit the farmer's market.** When you go plastic-free and zero-waste, you stop eating processed food—it's almost always packaged in shiny plastic wrapping. At farmer's markets however, you'll find fresh, seasonal, local, organic produce that you can usually buy unpackaged. [Find your local farmer's market in the US through Local Harvest.](#)
- 9. Shop at thrift stores and yard sales.** Opt for second-hand kitchen wares (and other wares too) rather than new. New items require energy and raw materials to produce and they almost always feature at least some plastic packaging.

What to Buy

- 10. Choose fresh, seasonal fruit and vegetables.** The best food for you—seasonal vegetables and fruit—is also best for the environment and economy when you buy it locally. It travels fewer miles. You can find much of it unpackaged. More of your money stays in your local community.

11. Opt for foods lower on the food chain. Where I live, cheese almost always comes wrapped in plastic. Meat is often either wrapped in plastic or portioned out on foam trays wrapped in plastic. When you eat lower on the food chain you waste less packaging materials (beans are often easy to find in bulk) and you reduce the amount of resources that go into producing food higher on the food chain. Meat requires much more water than vegetables, for example.

12. Buy milk in returnable glass bottles. I can buy milk from a few dairies that sell their milk in glass: [Claravale](#), which is raw, [Straus](#) and [St. Benoit](#). St. Benoit also sells yogurt in glass jars, which are recyclable but not returnable. Depending on where you live, your local dairy may deliver milk in glass bottles that it later picks up—just like the old days.

13. Buy loose bread in your own cloth bag. Many grocery stores and bakeries stock their loaves, rolls, bagels, pastries and so on, loose in a bin or display case. Put it in a cloth produce bag or hand your the bag to the clerk to do that for you.

14. Drink loose-leaf tea. [Fabric and mesh tea bags are often made of synthetic material \(i.e., plastic\)](#). Landfill aside, you don't want to eat or drink something after it has come into contact with hot plastic. When you heat food—or tea leaves—in plastic, nasty chemicals can leach into what you're about to consume. Even paper tea bags contain small amounts of plastic. And most tea bags—synthetic or paper—are individually wrapped, then stuffed into a box that is often wrapped in yet more plastic.

What not to Buy

15. Cut out the processed food. Shop the perimeter of the grocery store, where you'll find produce, dairy and the fish and meat counters. In the middle section—the aisles—you'll find only processed food and products wrapped in plastic packaging (think snacks and sodas, cereal and energy bars, canned vegetables and shelf-stable pickles). Cut the processed food and you've cut most of the plastic coming into—and out of—your kitchen.

16. Ban bottled water. According to The Story of Stuff website, Americans alone [“buy more than half a million bottles of water per week. That enough to circle the globe more than 5 times.”](#) This is madness.

17. Skip the bottled beverages. If you drink more water, you'll drink less soda, energy drinks and juice. Bottled beverages almost always come in plastic bottles and even when they are packaged in glass, they most always have big plastics lid that can't go in the recycling bin. Not that recycling is the answer. It's not. Reduction is.

18. Kick the K-cup. [In 2014, Keurig alone sold nearly 10 billion coffee pod packs, and that number includes multi-packs](#), so the true number is larger. Use a French press and ground coffee beans. Buy the beans in bulk and either have them ground at the store or grind them at home.

Out and About

19. Keep a zero-waste kit packed and ready to go. Into a small bag, pack your travel mug or thermos (I use a [Klean Kanteen](#)), a metal container or jar for leftovers, a napkin and real utensils. When you're out, if you want a cup of tea or coffee, a snack or a meal, you'll be prepared to both enjoy them waste-free and bring home whatever food you couldn't finish.

20. Tell your server up front. When you order in a restaurant, tell your server you don't want a straw, you'd like your coffee in a ceramic cup, you brought your own cutlery, you brought your own container for leftovers and so on. Let them know in advance so they don't bring unnecessary plastic to the table. Putting a straw in a drink is an automatic response for them.

21. Refuse stuff. Hand packaging you don't want back to cashiers, vendors, waiters and so on. For example, at my farmer's market, vendors often bunch vegetables like carrots, green onions and asparagus together with rubber bands. I pull these off and hand them back. The vendors always seem happy to have them to reuse.

In the Kitchen

22. Cook. If you cut the processed food, you'll cook more. Not only will you reduce your packaging waste, you'll also reduce your food waste because as you become more adept in the kitchen, you'll learn what to do with the food you already have on hand. That means you'll buy less food, eat a healthier diet and avoid [chemicals in plastic packaging that may leach into your food](#).

23. Learn to preserve food. Extend the season by fermenting food. A head of cabbage left at room temperature will rot within a couple of weeks. Preserve it through fermentation—make sauerkraut or kimchi—and it will keep for months, even a year or longer.

Read more about fermentation [here](#). Freezing also preserves food. [Roast and freeze tomatoes when they are in season](#) and during winter, you can forgo tomatoes in cans (which are lined with plastic).

24. Make non-dairy milk. Nut milks and rice milk almost always come in wasteful Tetra Paks, made of several layers of materials, including plastic. If you have a blender, you can make these milks yourself at home. [Here's a recipe for almond milk](#). [Here's one for rice milk](#).

25. Make more staples yourself. [Yogurt](#), [vanilla extract](#) and [chocolate syrup](#)—foods usually packaged in plastic—are easy to make. Other easy-to-make staples that usually come in either plastic or plastic-lined cans include [scrap vinegar](#), beans (either in a [pressure cooker](#) or [slow cooker](#)), [bean sprouts](#), [pumpkin purée](#)... For more ideas, [take a look at my recipe index here](#).

26. Compost. After you've finished preparing your meal, staples or fermented food, throw any unusable food scraps onto the compost pile. Some municipal compost bins require you to dispose of your compost in supposedly compostable plastic bags. You can however compost your food scraps at home with minimal effort. [Here's how I compost the lazy way](#).

27. Opt for glass food storage rather than plastic. Plastic food storage containers can range in color from opaque to foggy clear plastic. When you store food in glass containers, you can see what's in the refrigerator or pantry at a glance and you're more likely to actually eat it rather than let it go to waste. Plus plastic won't come into contact with your food.

28. Hoard glass jars. When you go plastic-free and zero-waste, you'll need jars. You can use them to fill up with staples in the bulk aisles, store food, freeze food, ferment food, sprout beans, pack lunches, transport lunch scraps home for compost, drink from, eat from. Find free or cheap jars by asking your neighbors for theirs, searching through recycling bins and hunting for them at thrift shops and yard sales. You can [easily remove labels and eliminate odors from the lids of used jars](#).

29. Store produce without plastic. Use cloth produce bags, glass jars and glass containers. Some produce, such as cauliflower, carrots, and cabbage don't need any special treatment. It can just roll around in your crisper drawer. Greens keep well in cloth produce bags. Store produce properly and you'll also reduce food waste. [For more information, read this post](#).

30. Freeze food without plastic. Use glass jars, cloth bags and metal containers. Take a few precautions, and you can safely freeze food in glass jars. Always leave headspace when freezing liquids. Be careful about how you stack jars in your freezer so they don't fall out when you open the door. To thaw, transfer your jar or container to the refrigerator the night before you need it. [For more information, read this post](#).

31. If you choose to filter your water, try naked charcoal. Unlike Brita filters, these hunks of charcoal have no packaging around them. Simply plop the charcoal into a pitcher or jug and fill with tap water. The charcoal will absorb chlorine, lead, mercury, cadmium and copper from the water, while imparting calcium, potassium, magnesium and phosphates. [Life Without Plastic carries these](#).

32. Ditch the plastic wrap. Want to cover a bowl of leftovers? Put a plate over it or cover it with a beeswax wrap, rather than a sheet of plastic wrap. [You can make beeswax wraps](#) (I have yet to try this) or buy them. I have some [Abeego Wraps](#) I really like. When they finally wear out (they last a long time), you can compost them.

33. Ditch the plastic baggies. You have several alternatives, such as metal LunchBots and metal tiffins. [Life Without Plastic also sells cloth sandwich bags](#). These look like they would be fairly simple to sew.

34. Ditch the paper towels. These not only waste paper but the plastic they are always wrapped in. Use rags instead, wash and reuse them.

35. Wash dishes with cellulose popup sponges. When plastic sponges begin to fall apart, little bits of them go down the drain. I use cellulose sponges that I buy loose at Rainbow Grocery in San Francisco. When they break down, I compost them.

36. Wash dishes with homemade dish soap. It doesn't lather up like the commercial stuff does but it works. [Here's the recipe](#).

In the Bathroom

37. Clean with vinegar and baking soda. These work well and you can [make your own vinegar out of fruit peels](#) or by letting [kombucha ferment to the point of vinegar](#). If you can't find bulk baking soda, buy the largest box of it you can find to reduce the

overall packaging waste (one large box versus many small boxes). After you ditch the plastic, you'll use it for all sorts of things around the home, from washing greasy pots to [washing your hair](#).

38. Buy loose bathroom tissue rolls wrapped in paper. I pay a bit extra for these so I either buy the most inexpensive brand or stock up when these go on sale. I usually buy [Caboo brand](#) or [Seventh Generation](#). These single rolls are quite large and so last a while.

39. Line the trash can with the paper. If you have reached zero-waste, you won't have a trash can in the bathroom but most people do. Line it with newspapers or the paper wrapped around your plastic-free toilet paper in #38.

Personal Care

40. Raid the pantry to make personal care products. If my hair is frizzy, I rub a very tiny dab of coconut oil between my palms and smooth that over my hair. When I cook with olive oil, I rub any excess into my hands to soften my skin. Dab small amounts of olive oil on your face also to moisturize it. You can make your own deodorant (#44) and toothpaste or toothpowder (#45).

41. Take back the bar. Liquid soap wastes so much plastic—the bottle and the pump. Use naked bars of soap. Whole Foods carries these. You can also buy them online from [Aquarian Bath](#), a plastic-free bath and body products shop.

42. Buy bulk shampoo or a shampoo bar or wash your hair the “no-poo” way. Some bulk stores carry shampoo in large vats. I have trouble finding shampoo bars locally. [You can buy them online from Aquarian Bath](#). You can also wash your hair with baking soda, followed by a vinegar rinse. [Get more information here](#).

43. Shave with a safety razor. Replacement cartridges, such as those from Gillette, both contain excessive amounts of plastic and are packaged in excessive amounts of plastic. Safety razors, on the other hand, shave with actual metal razor blades. When the blade becomes dull, you replace only the thin, inexpensive blade. [Life Without Plastic carries these razors](#).

44. Brush with a bamboo toothbrush. The bristles may not be biodegradable completely but the handle does. I use Brush With Bamboo. I can buy these at my Whole Foods and a local health food store. You can find them online at [Life Without Plastic](#) and [Tiny Yellow Bungalow](#).

45. Make your own deodorant. Combine 1/4 cup baking soda, 1/4 cup cornstarch and 2 tablespoons coconut oil in a glass jar. With your finger, apply a pea-sized amount under each arm. Works like magic. [Read more information here](#).

46. Make your own toothpaste. [Here is a recipe for toothpaste](#) and [here is one for tooth powder](#).

47. Use aloe for lube. Aloe works so well. [Grow an aloe plant indoors near a window](#), break off leaves as needed, squeeze out the juice and apply. Aloe juice also helps soothe cuts and sunburns.

48. Choose cloth diapers. Use a diaper service or buy cloth diapers and launder them yourself. Many disposable diapers are filled with chemicals and they waste paper and plastic.

49. Remove makeup with reusable cloth pads. I sewed some of these years ago—back when I still wore makeup. They are circles of flannel, stitched together. [Life Without Plastic sells these too](#).

50. Invest in a menstrual cup or reusable cloth menstrual pads. I use both. I sewed the pads out of old flannel receiving blankets I had made long ago when I was pregnant with my younger daughter. [Here are some patterns for pads](#). You can buy cloth pads from [LunaPads](#) and [Glad Rags](#). I also have a [Diva Cup](#). You can buy these at many drug stores and some grocery stores. Just look in the aisle with menstrual products. Both cloth pads and menstrual cups cost quite a bit upfront but eventually they pay for themselves many times over.

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