



A Room-by-Room Guide for Going Plastic Free: And other tips for living a more sustainable life

Part 1

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Plastic has gotten a bad rap for decades—we can all picture that sea turtle stuck in a six-pack ring. Though the impacts of plastic on wildlife and the environment are well documented, its effects on human health are now becoming clearer: Plastic exposure is linked to infertility, obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, strokes, neurodevelopmental disorders, and more.

Research shows that adults ingest the equivalent of one credit card of plastic per week. How? Plastic bottles, cups, containers, and other forms of the material often shed microplastics that get into our food, air, and water. They can saturate whole ecosystems and even move around the planet. They've been found in rain and snow, even in sea ice as far away as Antarctica.

While plastic is everywhere, we can significantly reduce exposure in our own homes. And while it may seem like an insurmountable task, it's possible to make progress without burning out. How? Just go one room at a time.

Your kitchen

If there's one room in your house to focus on, make it your kitchen. Swap out those plastic leftover containers for glass; invest in alternatives to plastic bags and plastic wrap, like cloth produce bags and beeswax covers; and replace your plastic utensils, sponges, and brushes with those made with natural materials. Look over your pantry—are there items you can easily upgrade next time, like loose-leaf tea and peanut butter in glass jars?

For example:

- Many popular kitchen utensils like spatulas are made of black plastic. These can be toxic to your health: Black plastic is typically made from recycled electronic waste, and these products may still contain toxic chemicals, such as flame retardants. Buy wood or stainless steel instead.
- Try to buy everyday items like nuts in bulk, and bring your containers to the store to purchase them. Many natural food markets now offer refill stations for such things as dish soap and shampoo.
- Weed out plastic sandwich storage bags and over time replace them with other ways to store food, like glass or bamboo containers. And don't reuse those leftover plastic containers: When plastic heats up, it sheds microplastics that can get into your food.
- Plastic water bottles can feel like a necessary emergency backup, but many cheap brands of bottled water come

in thin, papery plastic that can leach microplastics into the water, especially if the bottle has ever been heated, knocked around, or damaged.

- Notice items that see repeated friction, abrasion, or heat. Think plastic sponges, cutting boards, and coffee makers—scrubbing, cutting, and exposure to high temperatures can cause microplastics to shed into our food, water, and hands multiple times a day.
- For your next party, don't be tempted by the convenience of buying plastic utensils or plates that can then be dumped in the garbage. Single-serve plastic forks, knives, cups, bowls, and plates are among the worst offenders filling up landfills around the world.
- Learn to repurpose herbs, fruits, and veggies, avoiding future plastic purchases. Wilting herbs can be zapped in the microwave to become dried, for example, and veggie scraps can be frozen and turned into broth.
- Invest in learning to make your go-to foods. Mastering your own basic bread or salsa, for example, means one less packaged item to worry about.

Of course, the first rule of going plastic free is going zero waste. Before you go out and buy new, shop secondhand, and look to repurpose what you already have, like those glass jars in your recycling bin. The second rule is to look to your community: You might be surprised what a little research turns up, like the return of local (glass-jarred) milk delivery.

Your bathroom

Your home's next plastic-free target should be your bathroom. This one will be more difficult—there aren't tons of great alternatives to toothpaste, for example, so go easy on yourself. Start small and move from there.

- Look for eco-friendly floss, for starters. Some brands sell floss in cardboard packaging.
- You can find plastic-free toothpaste tablets and toothbrushes made of bamboo or recycled materials. If tablets aren't your thing, buy larger tubes to reduce packaging.
- For shaving, favor the shaving bars of soap over the bottled shaving creams.
- Make the switch to metal safety razors and natural loofahs and toothbrushes.
- For toilet paper (bidet, anyone?), go for bamboo or the kind wrapped in paper.
- And for those who wear makeup, opt for reusable cleansing cloths, plastic-free compacts and tubes, and even package-free items.

Lastly, do some retail research. More and more brands are jumping on the plastic-free train—you may be surprised what you find, like reusable, refillable body washes and stainless-steel deodorants.

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