



10 Ways to Reduce Plastic Pollution

January 05, 2016 [Sarah Engler](#)

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While taking in the crashing waves and relaxing on the beach, no one wants to think about how the ocean has basically become a garbage soup. But here's the truth: There are millions of tons of trash floating around in that water—and most of it is plastic.

This garbage soup is equal to 136 billion milk jugs added each year and is a danger to sea life. Animals can get tangled up in this trash or eat it—either because they mistake it as food or because the plastic has been broken down into tiny pieces by seawater.

Plastic is a specific problem as well because it's "nonbiodegradable" and sticks around for a lot longer (like up to 1,000 years longer) than other forms of trash. When something is nonbiodegradable it means that it is hard for it to be broken down into nature. If plastic is nonbiodegradable, for example, flowers, paper, and vegetables are all biodegradable.

This trash is not just from littering into the water; Around 80 percent of sea litter starts on land—either taken in by the coastline or carried to rivers from the streets during heavy rain.

So, the best thing we can do to protect our environment is to try to keep as much plastic as possible out of the trash in the first place. The good news? There are many small ways you can have a big impact.

1. Escape one-use plastics.

Ninety percent of the plastic items in our daily lives are used once and then thrown away: grocery bags, plastic wrap, plastic water bottles, straws, coffee-cup lids. Take note of how often you use this kind of plastic and replace them with reusable kinds. It only takes a few times of bringing your own bags to the store or water bottle to school before it becomes a habit.

2. Stop buying water.

Each year, close to 20 billion plastic bottles are tossed in the trash. Carry a reusable bottle in your bag, and you'll never have to buy water from a company again. If you're nervous about your local tap water, look for a reusable water bottle with a built-in filter.

3. Dodge microbeads.

Beauty products—face scrubs, toothpaste, body washes—might have plastic called “microbeads”. They may look harmless, but their tiny size allows them to pass through water-treatment plants. Unfortunately, they also look just like food to some sea animals. Look for beauty products with natural ingredients, like oatmeal or salt, instead.

4. Cook more.

Making your own meals doesn't involve takeout containers or bags. For those times when you do order in or eat out, tell the restaurant you don't need any plastic forks or spoons or, for some serious extra credit, bring your own food containers to restaurants for the leftovers.

5. Buy used things.

New toys and tech come with all kinds of plastic packaging. Search the shelves of thrift stores, neighborhood garage sales, or online for items that are just as good when previously used. You'll save yourself some money, too.

6. Recycle (duh).

It seems obvious, but we're not doing a great job of it. For example, less than 14 percent of plastic packaging is recycled. Confused about what can and can't go in the bin? Check out the number on the bottom of the container. Most beverage and liquid bottles will be #1 (PET), which is usually taken by most recycling companies. Containers marked #2 (HDPE; heavier bottles for milk, juice, and laundry detergent) and #5 (PP; plastic forks, knives, and spoons, yogurt tubs, ketchup bottles) are also recyclable in some areas. Contact your local recycling company to find out!

7. Support a bag tax or ban.

Tell your elected representatives to follow the lead of those in San Francisco, Chicago, and close to 150 other cities and counties by supporting law that would make plastic-bag use less wanted.

8. Buy things in larger sizes.

Single yogurts, small shampoo bottles, tiny packages of nuts—consider buying the bigger container instead of buying several smaller ones over time.

9. Put pressure on companies.

Though we can make a difference through our own habits, businesses have a much bigger footprint. If you believe a company could be smarter about its packaging, make your voice heard. Write a letter, send a tweet, or hit them where it really hurts: Give your money to a more environmentally friendly company.