Plastic Free July Posts
From the UUVC Green Team
2020

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Plastic Free July Day 1: Soap Swaps

Eliminating plastic from our lives is made even more difficult by the restrictions placed upon us by the pandemic. But even if we can't be completely plastic-free, we can work toward that goal by using less. To help make it easier, your Green Living Sales Team will post an idea each day of alternatives to plastic.

For details about Plastic Free July, click this link: https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/

Are you up to the challenge?

Idea for Day 1:
This is an easy one anyone can do. Swap bar soap for liquid soap. Cheaper, lasts longer and keeps millions of plastic bottles out of our oceans.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 2: Every Little (Toothpaste) Bit Helps

Today is Day 2 of the Plastic Free July Challenge. If you haven't already signed up to take the challenge to reduce your use of plastic, it's definitely not too late. We know that avoiding plastic is even more difficult now and don't want anyone to compromise their health, but there are still things we can do. Here's your tip of the day from the Green Team:

Did you know that over 1 Billion (yes, that's with a B) plastic toothpaste tubes are thrown in the trash every year? That's enough to fill 50 Empire State Buildings! Every year.

We have to brush our teeth but we don't have to keep adding to the pollution to do it. Bite Toothpaste Bits are just what they sound like--little compressed pellets of natural ingredients that you just bite--then brush! They come in several flavors in refillable glass jars. If you'd like to give it a try, the Green Living table has 30-day samples of Mint or Berry Twist for sale for $11 complete with delivery.

Yes, that is more expensive than buying toothpaste at Wal-Mart. But the benefits to the health to our planet? Priceless.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 3: Woohoo! Bamboo!

If you look closely at this sculpture of "Stella the Seahorse" from the Washed Ashore Project you'll see toothbrushes form a spine of her coronet. When the exhibit was at the Clinton Library, a young boy standing near me pondered aloud, "Why would people throw toothbrushes in the ocean?" The answer is, we don't. We throw used plastic toothbrushes in our bathroom trash cans—more than 1 Billion every year just in the United States. That's enough to stretch around the earth 4 times! Fifty million pounds of toothbrushes are added to landfills every year and many of these make their ways into waterways which eventually lead to the ocean. Enough to crown many, many Stellas.

So what are our alternatives to plastic toothbrushes? There are several, including silicone, but probably one of the most recommended options is renewable and biodegradable bamboo. These are not always easy to find in local stores but they are widely available online. Choose one with a changeable head and you'll cut your waste in half. A toothbrush may seem like a small thing but what if millions of us decided to change our ways? Every small step matters.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 4: Let's Meet at the Shampoo Bar

You've probably been buying shampoo in a plastic bottle for most of your life. So have millions of other people, and all those containers get tossed in a landfill when empty. That adds up to an estimated 552 million shampoo bottles...in just one year!

Another problem with shampoo in a bottle is that, like laundry detergent, it's mostly water. And water is heavy, which means that during transport from the manufacturer to your store, millions of gallons of fuel are used.

An excellent alternative is to use a shampoo bar. It looks like a bar of soap and lathers like one, but with ingredients to clean hair. The Green Team has been selling the brand shown in the picture, and I (Deanna) have been using it for about six months. I was not expecting to like it, to be truthful, but it's all I use now, and I love it: the scent is wonderful (coconut and mimosa) and the bar lasts a very long time, much longer than a bottle. The Green Team sells this bar for $3.50. It contains shampoo and conditioner, but the company also makes a bar that is just shampoo.

So besides keeping plastic out of the landfill, and helping to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel, there's another good reason to use a shampoo bar: no hassle going through a TSA checkpoint (if we ever really start flying again....).

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 5: Silicone Solutions

If you want to make a serious effort to cut back on plastics, you should become familiar with silicone, because silicone bags are washable and they can be used hundreds of times. If you replace those single-use Ziplock-type bags with silicone bags, think about how many plastic bags you won't be sent to the landfill.

The same is true of silicone stretch lids: use them instead of plastic wrap. These lids are really stretchy so they'll fit a variety of bowls. You can also stretch them over the cut sides of an onion or fruit.

The good: Silicone can be recycled, and it doesn't degrade into microplastics (a real problem in the oceans). It doesn't release toxins into the air when it's burned, and it can resist extreme cold and warm temperatures, making it great for food storage. The not-so-good: silicone is not biodegradable. Although it is recyclable, it is challenging to find a municipal facility that takes it.

Bottom line: silicone is the better choice compared to single-use plastics. The Green Team has a few silicone bag sets for sale. Each set has 10 bags: 5 are sandwich-size and 5 are snack-size. In the silicone stretch lids set, there are 6 lids of varying sizes. If you would like either set, just reply to this email.

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 6: Hug Your Food

According to the latest statistics available from the EPA, Americans toss more than 30 million tons of food in the trash every year. Almost a quarter of our landfill space is taken up with food waste. Let that sink in a minute. There are people all over the world, including in the United States, suffering from food insecurity and we're throwing away tons of it.

Why?
1. Overbuying
2. Poor planning
3. Incorrect storage

"Wait," you may be saying. "Food is biodegradable so it's not that big a problem, right?" Food is biodegradable—but only in the presence of oxygen. In the dark, anerobic landfill, food waste breaks down very slowly, if at all, releasing huge amounts of methane in the process—nasty stuff. So instead of decomposing, it mummifies. How do we know that? An archaeologist from the University of Arizona, William J. Rathje, and his team spent more than 20 years unearthing old landfills. He called it, appropriately enough, the Garbage Project. In his book, *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*, Rathje describes finding guacamole that looked "almost as good as new" sitting next to a newspaper thrown out in 1967!

So what can we do about it and why am I writing about this in Plastic Free July? Yesterday Deanna talked about silicone for food storage and today I want to tell you about a silicone product made especially for produce called Food Huggers.

Not only do these handy little covers replace wasteful plastic wrap to cover cut ends of round produce like onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, citrus fruits and more, they actually keep food fresh

longer and they're dishwasher safe. If you'd like to give them a try, the Green Team has a few for sale at $9 for a set of 4 and they're also available on Amazon.

And for those times when you discover that squishy object that used to be a veggie in the back of your produce drawer? Composting is the alternative to your trash can. No compost bin? No problem. Save up your scraps in a container in your freezer and take them to the compost bins in the rear parking lot at our church. Let's work together to be part of the solution!

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 7: BYOB

Today is the 7th day of the Plastic Free July challenge. If you've come along this far, let's celebrate! But it's strictly B.Y.O.B.—your own refillable bottle, that is.

Take a guess how many plastic water and soda bottles are purchased around the globe every day:

a) 100,000
b) 500,000
c) 1 million

If you chose "C" give yourself half a point because it was a trick question. It is estimated that 1 million plastic bottles are purchased around the globe every *minute*. Every. Single. Minute. Pretty astounding, isn't it? That's almost 1.5 billion bottles a day and all of them are meant to be used only once. Yes, they're supposed to be recyclable but only a tiny fraction of them are.

So what would happen if all of us thirsty humans simply filled up our own reusable water bottles instead? The plastics industry and the bottling industry would be very unhappy (boo hoo) and it would keep tons of plastic waste out of our landfills and oceans. It would also reduce the number of microplastic particles that are already in the food chain. Microplastic particles that end up on our dinner plates and inside of us.

If you're looking for a place to start your journey toward living a plastic-free life, this is it. One simple commitment and a step in the right direction. You can find a huge selection of refillable water bottles and insulated mugs for sale in stores or online. The Green Living Sales team has a few left for sale along with some simple caps that turn glass jars into instant drinking vessels. If you're interested in purchasing one, contact me, Janet Holt for prices and colors. Let's make every occasion B.Y.O.B.!

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 8: Alternatives to Plastic

Sensing the way the winds are blowing, manufacturers are responding to increasing consumer discontent with plastics. I've started seeing more ads touting bioplastics made from plants or natural substances and some products claiming to be "compostable." Looks like the perfect solution, doesn't it? But read the fine print and you'll find the catch. Most bioplastics are not biodegradable in home compost piles or in landfills. They require special commercial compost facilities which are few and far between. And some contain significant amounts of traditional plastic.

We can grumble all we want about the plastics industry but the real problem is our disposable lifestyle. If we're truly going to reduce our carbon footprints, the answer is to rethink our need to use things once and then throw them away. Here are some of the best alternatives to the plastic articles that have become such a major part of our lives:

1. Stainless steel. Stainless steel is strong, easy to care for and durable.
2. Glass. Inexpensive, easy to clean and infinitely recyclable. Plus it's pretty.
3. Silicone. Food grade silicone is made primarily of sand. Flexible, durable and heat tolerant.
4. Wood. A renewable resource
5. Bamboo. Lightweight, compostable, and made from a fast-growing renewable resource.
6. Paper. Lightweight, compostable.
7. Natural fiber cloth. Won't shed plastic bits when washed. Long lasting and some types are compostable.

Do all these materials cost more? Yes. But if you buy quality, you only have to buy them once. Sure you can find much cheaper plastic versions at the Dollar Store or at Wal-Mart. But the long-term cost of continuing to support the plastics industry is one none of us can afford.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 9: PPE = Plastic Pollution Everywhere

Our need for PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) has led to increased PPE (Plastic Pollution Everywhere.)

Every month we're using billions of disposable plastic gloves, masks, and protective goggles to protect ourselves from COVID19. As states make plans for upcoming elections, many are ordering single use pens and face shields to be distributed to voters at the polls. In a recent Aljazeera article, Jo Morley, head of campaigns at the non-profit UK organization, City to Sea, describes the pandemic as creating "an unprecedented challenge." She said, "Whilst we completely support the need for PPE [personal protective equipment] to keep us safe during these testing times, we're concerned about how these single-use masks and gloves are being disposed of."

We have to keep ourselves safe but does that mean a giant step backward in our fight against plastic pollution? Many of these non-recyclable items are already washing up on beaches and sinking to seabeds where they pose a health risk to humans and a hazard to sea life.

There is no question the pandemic has made the actions we can take more difficult. We can wear reusable, washable masks. We can forego disposable gloves and rely on reusable gloves and/or frequent handwashing. If you are shopping in person (instead of curbside pick-up) take your own bags. In our area, most stores are allowing this as long as you do your own bagging. If you're only purchasing one or two items, tell the cashier to skip the bag. And we can continue to refrain from purchasing plastic items or items in plastic packaging as much as possible. As bleak as the situation seems, it is encouraging that some organizations see the pandemic as an opportunity to *increase* momentum against single use plastics. In the same article, Louise Edge, senior plastic campaigner at Greenpeace UK stated, "The pandemic has interrupted progress on reducing the volume of single-use plastic we use, but we cannot let this become an excuse for ongoing inaction. Companies and governments still need to boldly step up and move us away from using plastic for throwaway items like food and drink packaging. They can ensure plastic is only used for essential items - like medical kit - and that it is captured and reused at the end of its life." Another UK based organization, Surfers against Sewage, says there is an urgent need not to take our eye off the ball. Their CEO stated, "Clearly, before the pandemic, PPE wasn't an issue and so adds another source of plastic pollution choking our ocean, However, we must not lose focus on the bigger issue of throwaway plastic production."

In another post, we'll talk more about applying pressure on corporations and government. Meanwhile, please do whatever you safely can and don't give up!

Janet Holt

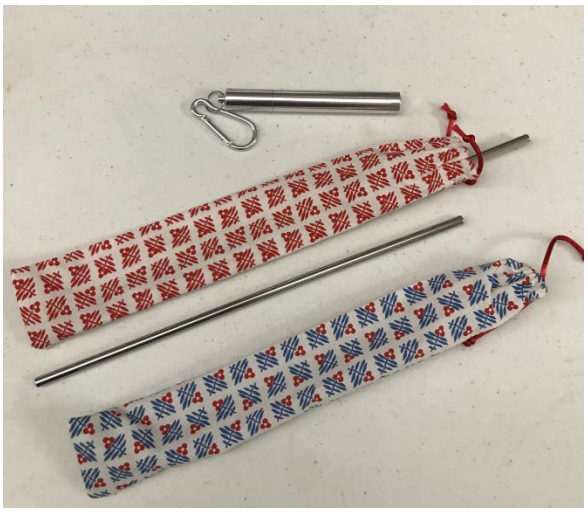
Plastic Free July Day 10: Plastic Straws Suck

In case you missed it, it was a turtle that started the anti-plastic straw movement. A marine biologist researcher and her crew saw a sea turtle with something in one of its nostrils. They pulled the turtle up into their boat, and discovered a plastic straw was lodged in its nose. They happened to film their efforts to remove the straw. You can click on the link below to watch it, but I want to warn you that it is upsetting, even though it has a happy ending. https://youtu.be/4wH878t78bw

The film caused an uproar and a new movement began to ban plastic straws. Starbucks and a few other chains now have only paper straws, but if you eat out you will likely find a plastic straw in your drink. Just say no: NO straw and especially not a plastic one! All plastic straws can end up in the ocean. Even if they don't, they end up in a landfill and won't breakdown for a very, very long time.

Reusable straws are easy and sanitary. If you don't carry a purse into a restaurant, you can carry a collapsible straw that will fit in your pocket. There are many reusable straws that fit in a purse. The Green Team has a few of both kinds for sale. The straws that don't collapse are in a washable cotton bag. The collapsible is in a small cardboard box. The straws are $4 each, for either kind. Contact Janet Holt mjholt@hotmail.com to purchase.

Deanna Tolliver



Plastic Free July Day 11: The Cutting Board Conundrum

One of the most important items in our kitchens is a good cutting board. But how do you choose which one is best? Many people believe that plastic cutting boards are the most hygienic choice because unlike wood or bamboo, you can put them in the dishwasher, But stand by for a surprise.

Strike 1: Microbiologists at the University of Wisconsin's Food Research Institute who were conducting experiments (ironically to learn how to make wooden boards as sterile as plastic ones) accidentally discovered that bacteria survive quite nicely on plastic boards. When they purposely contaminated both wooden and plastic boards with nasty organisms like Salmonella, Listeria and Escherichia coli, all common causes of food poisoning, 99.9 percent of the bacteria died off within three minutes on the wooden boards, while none died on the plastic ones. That's correct—none. Zero. Nada.
Strike 2: Although new plastic boards can be disinfected, knife-scarred plastic boards are impossible to completely disinfect. And strike 3: A knife-scarred plastic board means little bits of plastic are making their way into your food. Triple yuck! So plastic is definitely out of the running for best cutting board and hopefully soon will also be out of your kitchen for good (and maybe into the potting shed.)

That leaves us with natural materials to choose from for cutting boards. Wood is certainly a good, traditional choice. It's safe, functional, often beautiful and can last for years if properly cared for. But if you are looking for something to replace the plastic ones you tossed out of your kitchen (you did toss them out, right?) consider bamboo. Here's why:

- Bamboo is by far the most sustainable choice because it isn't wood. It's a grass that grows incredibly fast. I've read some varieties can grow as much as 3 meters a day!
- Bamboo is harder than wood so it resists scarring. Fewer knife cuts also mean fewer places for bacteria to hide and grow.
- Bamboo is less porous than wood which means it won't absorb moisture or take on odors.
- Because it is naturally moisture resistant, bamboo resists warping.
- Bamboo is less likely than wood to crack or split.
- Bamboo is easy to clean. Just wash with mild soap and water. After cutting meat, chicken or fish, a rinse with hydrogen peroxide or white vinegar is all you need to disinfect it.

One of the benefits of bamboo is also its only downside. You'll probably have to sharpen your knives a bit more often because it is such a hard surface. In the spirit of full disclosure, I love my bamboo cutting board and feel good knowing that it didn't cost the life of a tree to create. I hope you'll give one a try.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 12: Paper or Plastic? Neither!

I can still remember the first time a checker in the grocery store asked, "Paper or plastic?" I thought she was asking me whether I was paying by check or using a credit card! We thought plastic bags were the bomb way back then in the 80s. They didn't tear or fall apart like paper bags when they got wet and when we were done with them, we tossed them in the trash without a second thought. If only we could have seen into the future.

The plastics industry frequently cites a 2018 Danish study that concluded that plastic bags are less detrimental to the environment than paper or cotton tote bags. But that study focused on the manufacturing impact and not the harm plastic causes when it's discarded. In the U.S., only 1% of plastic bags are turned in for recycling. The rest of the 100 billion used in this country every year fill landfills, litter streets, clog waterways and kill marine life. Plastic bags kill 100,000 marine animals every year. That is a very sobering—and heartbreaking—number.

Until they come up with something better, reusable tote bags are our best option. I've read different reports on how many times you have to use them to be cost-effective but I think that's missing the larger picture. Dune Ives, the executive director of Lonely Whale summed it up when he said, "A reusable tote hasn't found its way in the belly of a whale, at least as far as I have seen."

My personal favorites are Canadian made Berghoff Trolley Bags. I've been using the same set of 4 since I purchased them in 2016. Running a quick calculation, I estimate using them along with washable drawstring bags for fresh produce keeps at least 2,000 plastic bags out of the landfill every year. And that's just for one family!

The Green Team has reusable produce bags for sale. And if you'd like your own set of Trolley Bags, here's a link: https://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/s/trolley-bags?ta=typeahead. If you need a 20% discount coupon, just ask me and I'll be happy to provide one.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 13: What is a Circular Economy?

Nature is circular. Living, growing plant life is nurtured in soil composed of living things that have died and decomposed. Animals eat plants and other animals. When they die, they decompose to nurture new life. The cycle of give and take is repeated endlessly, a perfect circle of life. That is, until humans came along and threw a wrench in the works.

We live in a liner economy: Make it, use it, and dispose of it. As a result of our obsession with economic growth and consumption, we've polluted our air and water, driven species to extinction, exploited natural resources to exhaustion, and poisoned our world to the point of being uninhabitable. We're buried in waste we've created that we can't get rid of.
Some who recognize this way of life is not sustainable are advocating for a circular economy as a solution to climate change. What would a circular business model look like? Among other things:

- We would stop extracting new raw materials and focus on reusing what we already have through improved recycling and recovery systems.
- Design would focus on multiple uses.
- We would use low-carbon, biodegradable alternatives to materials like plastic.
- Energy would be from renewable sources.
- We would abandon the absurd idea of "conquering" nature and resolve to live in harmony with it.

The World Economic Forum defines a circular economy as "An an industrial system that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design." At its core, a circular economy model has the intention of designing out waste.

Before humans there was no such thing as trash. Nobody is going to save us from the mess we've made but us.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 14: BYOU (Bring Your Own Utensils)

I'm guessing if you watched the video about the sea turtle with a straw stuck in its nose, you found it sad and upsetting and outrageous.

But think about this: what are the odds that the turtle was even seen, let alone rescued? There must be thousands, tens of thousands more sea animals that are suffering right now because of plastic pollution.

So it was only a matter of time before another sea turtle surfaced (pun intended), only this one had a plastic fork stuck in its nose. Lucky turtle: there were people who helped it by removing the fork: Here.

The answer to stopping plastic utensil pollution is the same as it is for straws: just say NO to plastic utensils. If you're eating out or ordering to go, you need to tell the wait person when ordering that you don't want plastic utensils: if you wait until your food is served, those utensils will likely be tossed in the trash when returned to the kitchen.

Just take your own knife, fork, and spoon. You can either take your own cutlery from home, or keep bamboo utensils in your car or purse so they'll always be available if you decide to eat out "spur of the moment."

Bamboo is a great choice because it's durable, biodegradable, naturally anti-bacterial, and renewable.

The Green Team has utensil wraps for sale, $8.00. Included is a napkin, stainless steel straw, and bamboo fork, knife, and spoon. The wrap folds into a small easy-to-carry bundle. There are many other options for utensil wraps. Here's one we found on Etsy:

Contact Janet at mjholt@hotmail.com if you're interested in buying a utensil wrap from The Green Team. In the interest of disclosure, I make the utensil wraps.

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 15: A Message From Your Dog: Ditch the Disposable Pads

It's Day 15 of Plastic Free July…we're halfway there!

And today is Part One of a two-part discussion about….dog pee and poop. (Cat owners can smugly choose to read or not). Inelegant terms, to be sure, but let's face the reality.

As much as we love our four-legged furry friends, we must also deal with their waste, at home or when out walking or hiking (tomorrow's topic).

There are two main times in a dog's life when accidents may occur in the house: as a puppy or as an aging senior dog. And these are the times when it can be helpful to have doggy potty pads in the house. Small dogs trained as puppies to use a potty pad often use them all their lives; this is particularly helpful during bad weather, if the dog starts to have mobility issues, or when traveling. Large dogs are usually weaned off the pads during housebreaking training.

These pads are helpful in other ways as well. Sometimes older dogs need to take medications that may challenge them to hold their urine while sleeping: a pad can be placed on the dog bed or area where it sleeps. There are downsides to these pads: a dog may think that all your throw rugs are like potty pads…bad dog!

But the biggest negative about potty pads has nothing to do with the dog: it's what happens when you throw them out. All of these pads must have an absorbent layer and a water impermeable layer, meaning…plastic. Like "disposable" diapers, these pads can stay in a landfill for many many years.

The answer: reusable, washable potty pads. One reusable pad can replace hundreds of disposable ones, greatly reducing plastic pollution.

I'll admit it: I've provided my small dogs with a potty pad for several years, and I would guess I threw one away on a daily basis. When I was learning to become more "green," I discovered washable potty pads and that's all my dogs have used for a couple of years. I saw an immediate reduction in the size of my weekly trash output and I believe there is less odor with a washable pad.

The Green Team has a set of washable potty pads for sale. The set includes 4 pad, each about 30" x 22," and there is a cute paw print design on the "up" side. The set of 4 is $30. These pads should last for years. Other pads are available online, but this is a great price for a set of 4. My dogs have been using the same ones for almost two years!

Deanna Tolliver, DVM

Plastic Free July Day 16: The Scoop on Poop Bags

Some dog owners use plastic shopping bags or food storage bags but most use bags that are sold specifically as dog waste bags. These bags are readily available to buy in stores where dog supplies are sold. Many dog parks have receptacles with bags, as well as trash containers to deposit used bags. Being responsible and keeping areas clean for others are admirable behaviors, but once again, the environment is being neglected in what is thought to be a good idea. Most of those plastic dog waste bags end up in a landfill. Where they sit and sit for decades without decomposing. Instead, use biodegradable bags made of cornstarch and other plant-based materials. They may take only three to six months to breakdown, depending on temperature and moisture. In other words, they become compost. Unfortunately,you must read the fine print on the side of the box. Many dog waste bags that are labelled as compostable do so ONLY in a municipal composting facility. That's not necessarily because the manufacturer is trying to deceive but compression and lack of oxygen may prevent the most earth-friendly products to stagnate instead of break down.Here's a link to an article that explains this in more detail, includes a review of biodegradable waste bags, and offers ideas for dog waste disposal that don't include bags at all. https://www.rover.com/blog/truth-about-biodegradable-poop-bags-in/If, however, you are like most of us, using a bag still is the best option. The Green Team offers a box of 200 biodegradable poop bags for$19. That's a pretty good deal!

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 17: All About Laundry

First the bad news: According to TreeHugger, North Americans wash more than 30 billion loads of laundry each year and that translates into a billion discarded plastic detergent jugs. By now you know that only a tiny percentage of plastic is recycled so most of these end up in landfills and in our oceans. Phosphates and toxic chemicals used in most commercial laundry products are a significant source of pollution in our waterways and transportation of all those heavy jugs (much of what you pay for is water) adds to air pollution. Now the good news: There are better options and you won't have to sacrifice cleaning performance. That's what this post is about.

Option 1: Dissolvable laundry detergent strips. A small envelope of these little strips contains the same amount of cleaning power as a heavy jug of liquid detergent or a plastic-lined box of powdered detergent, which translates to a significant reduction in transportation pollution. I can't vouch for all manufacturers but the products we sell on the Green Living Sales table are made by Dizolve, a Canadian company. They certify their products free of phosphates, chlorine bleach, parabens and 1,4 dioxane (whatever that is.) They are certified vegan which means no animal testing is done and claim to be hypoallergenic and biodegradable. The Dizolve website says they are introducing sustainable, non-plastic packaging, too. We are out of stock but you can buy their products on Amazon. Just type Dizolve into the search bar.

Option 2: Pure laundry soap powder. You can buy this online. One brand I found is made by The Simply Co. It is made of only 3 ingredients & comes in a glass jar. Cost is $18 for 60 loads. Here's a link: https://packagefreeshop.com/products/32oz-laundry-detergent-60-loads

Option 3: Make your own. Before you stop reading, it's easy. All you need is 3 basic ingredients: Castile soap (for cleaning), Borax (for whitening and deodorizing) and washing soda (helps remove dirt and odors.) You can make it in liquid or powdered form and if you really want to get fancy, even in pods. You can also add your favorite scents using essential oils. Here's a link to how to instructions: https://www.thespruce.com/diy-laundry-products-2145722 Don't want to grate bar soap? You can also buy soap flakes online but you'll pay more. Check out Pure Soap Flakes which comes in a brown paper bag on Amazon.

Why should you consider doing this?

- It's 100% biodegradable
- No unidentified chemicals
- No animal testing
- Saves money
- No plastic!

Sounds like a win-win to me!

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 18: Have a Ball in Your Dryer

Do you recognize these compounds: dipalmethyl hydroxyethyl ammonium methylsulfate, fatty acids, polyester substrate, clay, polyester, and fragrance?

Do you know what you get when you put them all together?

Dryer sheets.

You won't likely find these listed on the box of dryer sheets because the manufacturers are not required to list them. But many adverse health effects have reported by people exposed to them, such as asthma attacks, skin problems, and migraines, just from the fragrance coming out of the dryer vent.

As if that isn't a good enough reason to avoid them, think about all those billions of dryer sheets thrown away after one use, piling up in the landfills. They're made of a nonwoven polyester, which is, of course, plastic.

So just ditch the dryer sheets and use wool dryer balls instead.

They're usually about the size of a baseball, are made of felted wool, and can be used for hundreds of loads of laundry.

Dryer balls work in very different ways from dryer sheets. They bounce around in the dryer, pushing against wet layers of cloth that might otherwise stick together. This means the clothes dry faster, with less wrinkling. They also help reduce static.

Most dryer balls don't have added fragrance. There are sites on the web that suggest putting a few drops of an essential oil on the balls to add scent to the clothes, but because the oils can be volatile, you may not want to risk a dryer fire. Plus, if the oil isn't completely absorbed by the dryer ball, it may stain the clothes.

I've been using wool dryer balls in place of dryer sheets for about four years. I'm happy with the way they work, and will never go back to dryer sheets. Yes, they DO sound like tennis balls in the dryer, but I would rather hear a little noise than contribute to more plastic pollution. They're inexpensive and an easy way to help cut back on plastic pollution.

There are many dryer balls on the marketplace; here is the link to the brand we sell at The Green Team table

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 19: Becoming a Conscientious Consumer

Every day we make choices. Some are monumental. Most are just those daily choices that we make almost automatically. But this month, we're asking you to think a bit before making choices, because you really can make a difference in our planet's future if you do. Let's start at the grocery store:--Choose to take your reusable shopping bag sinstead of taking home plastic ones.--Choose to take reusable produce bags, instead of taking home even more plastic!--Choose produce that is NOT pre-packaged in plastic, if you can. If its unavoidable, try to find an upcycled way of dealing with it when you get home. For example, I prefer to buy organic spinach. Most of the time the only way I can buy it is in a clear plastic box. Granted, the box is #1 recyclable plastic. But by now, most of you are aware that recycling really isn't the answer to our plastic pollution problem. I try to find ways to re-use those plastic boxes. Here are a few: 1) mini-terrariums to start new plants/seed. I poke holes in the top for aeration;2) cut off the lid and use the bottom as a drain pan for plants 3) decorate the box (it even has a lid) and use it for closet storage4) store compost in it in the freezer until taking it to the compost pile.--Choose to buy eggs in a recyclable cardboard container instead of plastic.--Choose glass containers instead of plastic whenever you can(salad dressing, for example).--Choose to return containers to the store to be refilled (at Whole Foods, for example).--Choose to say NO! to K-cups! All of those little plastic cups that you used are still sitting in the landfill because they're made of plastic and they won't breakdown. You could choose to use the brown paper filters (better because they're aren't bleached) but best of all is the reusable filter that can just be cleaned between uses.--Choose products that are packaged in recycled materials.--Choose to buy foods in bulk and store in glass containers (grains, flour, cereal)Instead of buying meat at the grocery store, check out your options at a local butcher shop. Some sell meat from pasture-raised beef, which is less harmful to the earth than feedlot-fed beef, and many sell meats packaged in paper instead of white plastic boxes wrapped in plastic. Try to be more aware of your what you buy and how it's packaged. You DO have a choice. Rethink. Refuse. Reduce. Reuse. Repurpose. Recycle.

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 20: Make Your Own Household Cleaners

The best way to reduce plastic pollution is to just not bring plastic home: Stop buying the items that are packaged in it.

But, you may ask, what are you to do about shampoo, dish detergent, laundry soap, and even weed killer, to name a few? *Start making your own*.

If you look around your home at the things you buy that are packaged in plastic bottles, for example, most of them have the same main ingredient: water.

Why pay for water? You already pay for water to come out of the faucets, so why not just use it? Water is heavy and contributes negatively to transportation costs, which increases product costs.

Plus, every plastic bottle you reuse and/or repurpose is a plastic bottle that doesn't end up in the landfill. Many plastic containers can be repurposed. If you keep Plastic #1 out of the trash, great! If you keep Plastic #5 out of the pollution stream, even better because #5's can't be recycled. Feta cheese and cottage cheese containers are #5's, but they can be cleaned and used as storage containers. I use one to hold drill bits in the garage, and another holds buttons in the sewing room.

You can make your own cleaning spray, furniture polish, weed killer, hummingbird food, and laundry soap, to name just a few. In these days of internet searching, "google" how to make your own dish detergent and you'll get over 27 million results!

Start by cleaning and saving those plastic containers instead of tossing or recycling them: shampoo bottles, dish detergent bottles, and spray bottles are good ones to start with. Look over the recipes in the link and see what you need to make them. Most of the recipes in the link use common household products, but if you don't normally have washing soda on hand, for example, it's easy to order from Amazon.

Essential oils are often ingredients in homemade cleaning recipes, but if you don't have any, that's okay: they're included just for fragrance, although some, such as tree tea oil, have been shown to have disinfectant properties.

Making your own cleaning products can be fun, it's easy, they're often safer for your health, and you'll be keeping some plastic out of the landfill. It's a win-win-win-win!

Deanna Tolliver

All Purpose Disinfectant Cleaner

2 c water
½ tsp Castile soap
16 drops tea tree oil
16 drops essential oil

Mix together in a spray bottle. The essential oil is just for fragrance.

Another Cleaning Spray

Essential oils:
- 10 drops lemon
- 8 drops tree tea
- 6 drops rosemary
- 6 drops orange
- 2 c distilled water
- 2 Tblsp white vinegar

Mix all ingredients in a spray bottle. Shake gently before each use.

Safe Soft-Scrub

¼ c borax
Castile soap (liquid)

Mix the borax and just enough Castile soap to make a thick paste. Scrub and wipe clean.

Window/Glass Cleaner

4 c water
¼ c vinegar
1 Tblsp Cornstarch
6-10 drops essential oil

Mix together in a spray bottle. The essential oil is just for fragrance.

Another Glass Cleaner

1 c water
¼ c white vinegar
2-3 drops liquid dish soap

Mix all ingredients in a spray bottle. Gently shake before use.

Weed Killer

2 c white vinegar
2 Tblsp table salt
A few drops of dish detergent

Mix all ingredients in a spray bottle. Shake to dissolve the salt. Works best on newly-emerged plants that aren't over about 4-5 inches. Spray to cover the leaves with solution.

Ironing Spray

¼ c grain alcohol (180 proof)
2-3 c distilled water
4-6 drops essential oil

Pour all ingredients into a spray bottle. Shake for 1 minute. Let sit overnight before use. The essential oil is just for fragrance.

Dryer Sheets

½ c white vinegar
8 drops essential oil of your choice
Cotton cloths

Cut the cloths into about 8" squares. Mix the vinegar and the essential oil. In a container with a lid, pour the mixture over the cloths until they are damp but not soaked. Keep tightly closed. The cloths can re-used.

Wood polish

¼ c olive oil
¼ c white vinegar
10 drops essential oil (orange, lemon, etc)

Mix all ingredients in a small spray bottle. Shake gently before use.

Baby Powder

Corn starch
Arrowroot starch

Essential oil of your choice

Mix equal parts of corn and arrowroot starch (1/2 c each). Add about 12 drops of essential oil for fragrance.

Laundry Detergent

One 5 oz. bar castile soap
1 c washing soda
½ c baking soda
½ c citric acid
¼ c coarse sea salt

Grate the soap and then combine all ingredients. Store in an airtight container. Use 1-2 Tblsp for each load of laundry.

Liquid Dish Detergent

2 ½ c boiling water
1 Tblsp borax
1 Tblsp washing soda
2 Tblsp white vinegar
½ c liquid castile soap
10 drops essential oil (optional)
Container (empty dish detergent bottle)

In a mixing bowl add the Borax, washing soda, castile soap, and white vinegar. Slowly add the boiling water and gently mix. A whisk works well to do this. Then add the essential oil if using it.
Let the soap come to room temperature before pouring it into a container. It will thicken as it cools.

Plastic Free July Day 21: Microplastics

We've talked at length about the microplastics in our oceans that are a result of plastic waste gradually breaking down into smaller and smaller bits. This post is about the second major source of microplastic pollution that goes right down our drains. Microbeads and microfibers are too small to be filtered out in sewage treatment plants so they proceed unimpeded into our rivers and oceans where toxins and bacteria readily bind to them. Mistaken for food, these shiny bits are ingested by fish. That is how they enter the food chain and may ultimately end up on your dinner plate. Would you care for an order of heavy metals, pesticides, and pharmaceuticals with your salmon?

Plastic microbeads were the darling of the cosmetics industry, used in thousands of personal care products—cleansers, shave cream, body wash and even toothpaste— until 2015 when President Obama signed the Microbead-Free Waters Act to ban plastic microbeads from rinsed-off cosmetic products throughout the US territory. Another significant source of microplastic pollution may be as close as the shirt on your back. While the new law was a positive step, it does not regulate microbeads for industrial purposes. A common item that falls under the industrial category is laundry detergent. In 2019, students at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory discovered the washing of laundry is a significant source of microplastic pollution. One unnamed but "exceedingly popular detergent brand" was found to contain approximately 178,000 microbeads in one milliliter of detergent. That's equal to over 2.5 million microbeads per load of laundry!

And it's not only the plastic in the detergent that cause problems. The students found that microfiber shed from the laundry itself was a significant source of pollution. As you might expect, the shed from synthetic fabric, like polyester, nylon and acrylic was more damaging than fibers from biodegradable fabrics. I found some products advertised that claim to capture/prevent fibers from going down the drain like Cora Balls and Guppyfriend Washing Bags but I haven't tried them so can't recommend them. If you decide to give one a try, please give us a report. So until we have a solution or they design washing machines with better filters what can we do?

- Buy fewer clothes
- Check labels and choose clothing made from natural fibers
- Make your own laundry soap
- Wash only when necessary
- Check product ingredients for microbeads, especially items that claim to polish, add extra shine, or shimmer. Because they are made from various plastics, they come under many different names, making them hard to spot. Here are some of the most commonly used plastics to look out for:

- polyethylene (PE)
- polypropylene (PP)

- polyethylene terephthalate (PET)
- polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA)
- nylon (PA)

If you have other solutions, please send us your comments!

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 22: The Great Food Cover-Up (But not plastic)

Have you noticed that much of the single-use plastic we buy is for the kitchen? Specifically, for food storage. And that's the topic of today's post.

I think the most difficult plastic for me to give up was Ziploc bags. I used them for leftovers, for bread, for homemade dog food, for scraps, for snacks. I even used them a lot in the sewing room, for fabric scraps, large bags for holding sewing projects, small ones for keeping same-color buttons sorted. I'll bet some of you can relate.

But single-use plastic is the worst. And zip-type bags aren't alone in that distinction. Plastic wrap is another bad guy. I wanted to start using alternatives to single-use plastic.

First, though, I want to say that if you are still using these zip-type bags or plastic wrap, and want to do better, don't immediately throw them out and replace them with alternatives. Use them and re-use them and repurpose them until they just don't work anymore, then replace.

Instead of zip-type plastic bags use:

--silicone bags*
--silicone food huggers*
--glass storage containers (many have silicone lids)
--canning jars
--stainless steel containers with lids (Tiffin boxes)*
--Pyrex and other ceramic containers

Instead of plastic wrap use:

--silicone food huggers*
--silicone stretch lids*
--beeswax wraps*
--cotton bowl covers (with elastic….remember these?)
--wax paper

If you have a few plastic food storage containers, again, don't throw them out. They can be repurposed to store non-food items (think nuts, bolts, or nails).

To add to their inherent plastic badness, there is evidence that some plastic bags can leach chemicals into food. An interesting study by The Plastic Soup Foundation (plasticsoupfoundation.org) showed that hobby fish kept in food-grade plastic bags contained high concentrations of nonylphenol (a common chemical in plastics) within 48 hours. All of the fish died by day eight, but the control fish kept in glass bowls were fine.

Chemical leaching is made worse with heat. Like heating your food in a plastic container in the microwave. (Plastic—it's what's for dinner!).

It's time to ditch plastic in the kitchen. You can do it!

*These items are available from the Green Team. Contact Janet: mjholt@hotmail.com

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 23: Make Your Own Yogurt

Eating yogurt has all kinds of health benefits but the plastic cups it comes in are a scourge. Not only are most of them not recycled (and many are non-recyclable) they are a terrible hazard to wildlife. Skunks are especially vulnerable. Tempted by the sweet smell in discarded cups, the animals stick their heads inside and get stuck. They can force their way in but the design of the container makes it impossible for them to back out again. Can you even imagine how terrifying that must be? Deprived of air, unable to see, eat or drink, they suffer terribly before they die. The worst offender is Yoplait. After countless consumer complaints about the design, they printed a message on their cups, "Crush Cups to Protect Wildlife." Seriously? That's the best they can do? The best we can do is to not buy any yogurt that comes in a plastic cup. There is at least one brand I know of that comes in glass now but yogurt is so easy to make at home, why buy it? This post will tell you how.

Method 1: Yogurt Maker

I have used the same yogurt maker for years and it does a fine job. Mine is a Euro Cuisine model that comes with 7, 6-ounce glass jars with lids. For soft yogurt, there are just 2 steps:

- Whisk either powdered yogurt starter or plain yogurt from a previous batch into room temperature milk. Pour into jars.
- Arrange jars in yogurt maker (without lids,) cover, and come back in 8 hours. Cap and refrigerate.

If you like super thick yogurt, like I do, there's one extra step. First bring the milk to a boil and then let it cool down to 110° to115° before adding starter. I also add non-fat powdered milk for extra thickness.

Method 2: Instant Pot

This is as easy as it gets and is one more reason to love your Instant Pot.

- Pour milk into Instant Pot. Whisk in a packet of yogurt starter or a generous blob (at least 2 tablespoons) of your last batch of yogurt.
- Secure the lid and press the "Yogurt" button.

Really, it's that easy. In about 8 hours the display will read "Yogt" and it's ready. Remove the inner pot without stirring and cover with a silicone lid. Cool in fridge for 4 hours or until thoroughly chilled. If you want sweet yogurt, add a 14 ounce can of sweetened condensed milk to the blend in the first step.

Other Methods:
If you don't have either of these, there are other methods of making yogurt that don't require special equipment but I haven't tried them. Here's a link to a site that tells you how it's done.
Make Yogurt without a Yogurt Maker

Whatever method you try, I think you can see that although it takes some time, making yogurt at home is almost effortless. Good for you—and good for the planet. Give it a try—the skunks will thank you.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 24: Make Your Own Salad Dressings

Summer is the perfect time for salads. There are lots of good fresh fruits and veggies at the Farmer's Markets and who wants to cook in the heat? But commercial salad dressings are mainly sold in plastic bottles so how do we avoid that? Make your own, of course! (You knew I was going to say that didn't you?) This post offers a few tried and true recipes of old favorites. They're easy—and there are no ingredients you can't identify much less pronounce. If you have your own favorite recipes, please share them with us on the Green Team Facebook page. Enjoy summer's bounty and toss some salads—but first, toss those plastic bottles into the recycle bin!

Classic Vinaigrette

Ingredients:

1 clove garlic, chopped
1/4 t. salt
2 T. good wine vinegar or lemon juice
1/4 t. Dijon
9 T. olive oil

Method:

1. Mash garlic and salt together to make a paste
2. Stir in vinegar and mustard
3. Gradually whisk in oil
4. Season with freshly ground pepper

Ranch Seasoning Mix and Dressing

Ingredients:

1/3 C. dry powdered buttermilk
2 T. dried parsley
1-1/2 t. dried dill week
2 t. garlic powder
2 **t.** onion powder
2 t. dried minced onions
1 t. ground black pepper
1 t. dried chives
1 t. salt

Method:

1. Mix all ingredients together in a jar with a tight sealing lid.
2. To make dressing, combine 1 tablespoon of mix with 1/3 c. mayo or yogurt and 1/3 c. milk Shake well

Note: 3T of this mix = 1 packet of store-bought mix

Creamy Blue Cheese Dressing

Ingredients:

1/2 C. Mayonnaise
1/2 C. sour cream
3 oz. buttermilk
1/2 t. crushed garlic
1/4 t. ground pepper
1/4 t. dry mustard
1/4 t. salt (or to taste)
1/4 t. sugar
1/2 t. Worcestershire sauce
2 oz. blue cheese, grated

Method:

1. Whisk all ingredients except blue cheese until well blended
2. Mix blue cheese in a little at a time until blended.
3. Cover and refrigerate for a few hours to blend flavors.

Honey Mustard Dressing

Ingredients:

1/4C Dijon mustard
3 to 4 T honey
1/4 C apple cider vinegar
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 T fresh lemon juice (optional)
3/4 t salt
1/4 t freshly ground black pepper

Method:

Whisk or shake in a sealed jar until well blended.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 25: Make Your Own Condiments

Even for the most conscientious consumer it's almost impossible to find condiments like mustard, mayo, and ketchup in glass jars anymore. I get why the manufacturers and suppliers like plastic containers. It's lighter and less expensive to ship and there's less breakage. It is probably cheaper than glass, too, but the cost of all that discarded plastic to the environment is astronomical. The solution? Make your own. Today's post is to show how easy that really is. More recipes for you to try! Come on, admit it—you've got the time.

Ketchup

Ingredients:

8 ounces tomato sauce
6 ounces tomato paste
6 ounces water
2 T. cider vinegar
2 T. maple syrup
1 T. brown sugar
1 t. salt
1/4 t. onion powder
1/8 t. garlic powder
Pinch allspice

Method:

1. Combine all ingredients in a saucepan over low heat
2. Simmer until smooth and slightly reduced, about 20 minutes.
3. When cool, transfer to a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid
4. Keep refrigerated.

Note: This tends to splatter so either use a screen or a lid to avoid an afternoon of cleaning the stove. Leave out the brown sugar if you prefer it less sweet.

Mayo

Ingredients:

1 C. avocado oil
1 egg yolk (room temp)
½ t. Dijon mustard (room temp)
1/4 t. salt (adjust to taste)
1 T Fresh lemon juice (adjust to taste)

Handheld immersion blender or a food processor recommended but if you can multi-task you could also use a whisk.

Method:

1. Add all ingredients to bowl except use only 1/4 cup of the avocado oil to start.
2. Let sit a few moments then mix the ingredients with your appliance or whisk until blended.
3. With the machine running, very slowly drizzle in the remaining oil until you have a creamy emulsion.
4. Adjust lemon juice and salt to your liking and refrigerate.

Note: Adding the oil slowly is the key to success with this so take your time.

Mustard

We're not big mustard eaters at our house so I haven't tried to make it. But here's one I found online that got good reviews. If you try it, give us a report.

Bon Appetit!
Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 26: Make Your Own Dips & Spreads

Yep, more recipes today because so much of what we buy in plastic is so simple to make at home. Not only do we not contribute to plastic waste by making our own, we have total control over the ingredients. Today's post is about how to make 3 favorite dips and spreads.

Peanut Butter

Peanut butter is a favorite at our house but it is almost impossible to find it packaged in glass jars. After I watched a documentary on the destruction of rain forests I had another epiphany. Many well-known brands of commercial peanut butter contain palm oil, which is widely used in a number of products. Why is that bad? Because growers destroy rain forests and wildlife habitat to plant Oil Palm trees. Palm oil is also linked with abuse of indigenous groups as developers move in to seize land. Again it's not a case of what's right but what's profitable.

It is so easy to make peanut butter. In fact, the homemade version requires only 1 ingredient—peanuts—a food processor and a bit of patience. Here's how you do it:

Method:

1. Put about 3C of peanuts into the bowl of a food processor to make 1C of peanut butter.
2. Turn it on. Stop every 30 seconds or so to let the machine rest. It will start out chunky then clump into a ball. But keep pulsing and you'll gradually be rewarded with the smoothest, creamiest peanut butter you've ever tasted.

Notes: Want chunky peanut butter? No problem. Just add some chopped peanuts. And if you use unsalted peanuts, you might want to add a pinch of salt. Experiment with this. Add a bit of honey, a sprinkle of cayenne or cinnamon. I'm on the trail of peanuts that don't come in plastic jars and will keep you updated.

Hummus

Ingredients:

1/3 C Tahini
2 T. water
2 T. Extra virgin olive oil
1/2 t. ground cumin
3/4 t. salt (or to taste)
2 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed or grated
2T fresh lemon juice
15 oz. cooked chickpeas (aka garbanzo beans)

Method:

1. Add all ingredients except chickpeas to the bowl of a food processer and process until smooth
2. Add the chickpeas and process, scraping down sides, until well blended. If it's too thick, add a bit more water
3. Taste for seasoning and add lemon juice, salt, or cumin until it's just the way you like it.

Pimento Cheese Spread

This recipe is courtesy of my friend, Betsy Rusk, who makes scrumptious Pimento Cheese. Thanks, Betsy!

Ingredients:

8 oz. Sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
2 oz Diced pimentos, drained
1/2 C to 1 C Mayo

Method:

1. Mix everything together until blended and you're happy with the consistency. Adjust by adding more mayo.
2. Chill before serving.

All you favorites—easy peasy—and not a plastic container in sight!

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 27: Say Cheese!

OK, this is the last article about food but I hope by now you can see how easy it is to make some of our favorites at home and avoid commercial plastic packaging. Today's post is not about making anything—it's about storing a food that is almost universally loved. I'm talking cheese. Lovely, sweet, salty, sharp, mild, pungent, delicate, creamy, crumbly, ooey gooey cheese. But how many times have you gone to your fridge with cheese on your mind only to find a chunk that has fossilized? Or has turned black with mold? Yuck. I've found several different viewpoints on storage methods but the one thing cheese experts consistently agree on is the worst thing you can do to cheese is wrap it in plastic. As it turns out, cheese needs to breathe and requires some humidity to stay at peak flavor. Plastic wrap allows neither and can leach some unpleasant bits right into the cheese. So what do they recommend? Cheese paper was the most widely agreed upon method but since that's not something we are likely to find in our markets, I went looking for alternatives. Here's some Plan B ideas if you're a little short of cheese paper at your house:

- Wrap cheese in waxed paper or parchment paper (lets it breathe) and store in a covered container in your produce drawer (for humidity.) I discovered an added bonus of parchment paper is that you can write the variety and purchase date right on it.
- Wrap cheese in beeswax wraps and store in a covered container in your produce drawer.
- A cheese dome. Apparently these are best for soft or semi-soft cheeses like Brie, Camembert, Havarti, Gouda, and their kin. It works by giving cheese breathing room and they're pretty, to boot.
- A cheese vault. This is basically a storage box with a ridged bottom. One type I saw comes with a removable tray so you can put a dampened paper towel in the bottom to create needed humidity. Some experts recommend dampening that paper towel with vinegar to retard mold growth and they swear it won't affect the taste of the cheese.
- Rub the cut side of the cheese with olive oil or other vegetable oil. Wrap in a tea towel and store in an airtight container.

If you buy cheese at a cheese shop or market, ask them to wrap it in paper and skip the plastic. You'll just be throwing that away as soon as you get home anyway. If anyone has other methods I didn't list here, please share with us. The Cheeseheads of the world will thank you.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 28: Chew on This

I promised no more articles about food but this one is still on the subject of chewing—gum, that is. What does this have to do with plastic? Glad you asked. Chewing gum used to be made from a tree sap called *chicle* but now it is almost all made with chemical compounds including, you guessed it—plastics. At least one of these, polyvinyl acetate, the same polymer used to make glue, has been shown to cause tumors in lab rats. So how can you know what you're chomping down on? You can't. Because polyvinyl acetate, along with a host of other toxic components such as artificial sweeteners and preservatives, is listed as a single ingredient on packages: Gum base. "Why?" you may be wondering, "are manufacturers allowed to use toxic substances in a product designed to go into our mouths?" The short answer is money. After the lab rat study was published by the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer, Canada had the audacity to suggest polyvinyl acetate should not be allowed in chewing gum. This prompted such a furious backlash from gum manufacturers that the Canadian regulators backed down.

And where does all that ABC (already been chewed) gum go when we're done with it? It is a huge source of litter pollution. Singapore actually bans chewing gum unless the chewer has a medical prescription for it (to quit smoking, for example.) Because it's not biodegradable it sticks around—literally—for a long, long, time. It makes its way into the food chain when fish consume it and that means if you are a seafood eater, you may get to chew it twice.

There are some programs such as Terracycle in the U.S. and Gumdrop in Britain that collect chewing gum and recycle it. This is an improvement but ultimately it is just used to make more plastic items. There are a few biodegradable chewing gum alternatives on the market but if you really want minty fresh breath, the best thing to do is skip the gum and just brush your teeth. Your mother was right—chewing gum is bad for you.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 29: Compostable Trash Bags: Fact or Fiction?

Are there really any "green" trash bags?

Well, it's complicated. First, we need a definition of terms:

Compostable: "Composting is a natural process that turns organic materials into a conditioner for soil." (Biodegradable Products Institute)

Biodegradable: "Capable of being broken down especially into innocuous products by the action of living things (microorganisms)". This means a product doesn't have to be all-natural and it won't necessarily contribute to good soil, but it will break down faster than a product that isn't biodegradable.

Second, be aware there is a difference between municipal/commercial composting and backyard/home composting. There are very few commercial composting facilities that take trash bags; most are facilities that take yard waste.

A few years ago, I bought a box of "green" trash bags. It wasn't until later that I noticed, in small letters, that the bags were compostable ONLY in an industrial facility. I felt misled but used them anyway. The bags were made by a company called UNNI.

Well, UNNI has changed the game since I bought their bags. They now sell bags made from 100% corn and they ARE certified for home composting. In fact, you are warned to use the bags within a year and to be careful when exposing them to liquids because they may start to break down and leak before they get to your composter or compost pile.

Is it worth it to use them if you don't compost? I think yes, because even if it takes them much longer to break down in the anaerobic conditions of a "regular" landfill, at least when that happens, they won't be breaking down into small bits of plastic. But, as is true of many products that are better for the earth, the UNNI bags are more expensive than those made of plastic.

Another company, Eco Smartbags, makes bags that are labelled "Eco-Friendly: The Unique Trash Bag that Disappears 100%...Naturally!" These are biodegradable bags, and the company says they can be used in home composting. They WILL break down, BUT they contain plastics and plastic resins, so when they fall apart, they just become SMALL pieces of plastic.

I'm going to give the UNNI bags another try. They might not be the best answer, but they seem to be the best we have so far. Here's the Amazon link.

Deanna Tolliver

Plastic Free July Day 30: Use Your Voice!

In 2019, 250 million people from 177 countries took part in the Plastic Free July Challenge. Perhaps you were one of the millions that took the challenge this year. The PFJ Foundation reports that 9 out of 10 people make lifestyle changes during the challenge that became permanent and every change we make counts. But as important as these are, the chief responsibility for the glut of plastic packaging we're drowning in belongs to the people who make, sell and ship the products as well as our legislators. It's important to let them hear from us. We also need to reach out to local officials and store managers. Here are some actions we can take to go to the source:

1. Contact manufacturers of the products we buy and ask them to pay more attention to packaging by selecting alternative biodegradable materials wherever possible and using more recycled plastic.
2. Contact online shippers and ask them to ease up on the overpacking. How many times have you had to dig through a huge box of bubble wrap or Styrofoam peanuts to find one small piece of merchandise?
3. Ask your local stores to add more bulk bins and to allow you to bring in your own containers when you shop. If you buy from the deli or meat counters, ask them to wrap your purchases in paper. Better yet, take your own containers and have them pack your items in those. They can stick a bar code label right on the top.
4. If you choose not to buy a product because of its packaging, let the store manager know why you passed it by and ask them if they'll consider alternatives that are more environmentally sound..
5. Petition local authorities to establish commercial composting facilities. A commercial compost facility creates the perfect balance of heat, moisture, and oxygen to break down organic and plant-based materials. Most of the "compostable" paper items you buy can only be composted in a commercial facility and we've discussed how much landfill space is taken up by food waste in an earlier post. Yard trimmings can also be composted in a commercial facility.
6. Keep up the pressure on elected officials (be the squeaky wheel) and consider their environmental records when it's time for you to cast your votes.

What's the best way to reach them? Here are a few tips:

1. Contact the right person. You can find the names of customer service managers and marketing heads online with a little sleuthing. Addressing them by name gets attention. I've provided a list of local store managers to save you a step.
2. Calls get a better response than letters and letters get a better response than digital correspondence. I'll share a personal example. I once had a problem with a new, non-working computer mouse. Frustrated after getting canned responses from customer service, I looked up the name of the company president and called and asked to speak

with him. They put me through. He not only sent me a replacement for the dud mouse, he gave me his personal cell phone number in case I had future problems!

3. Be respectful. Demanding is overrated. A demand results in resistance and defense. A request, especially a reasonable one, is more likely to get a thoughtful response. Finding common ground and building a relationship is pure gold.
4. Online petitions from environmental organizations have their uses but sending in their form letters is not very helpful. Write in your own voice. Let them see the real human sending in a concern.

Plastic Free July may be over but our commitment to breaking our addiction to non-reusable plastic is not. It takes real effort to change behaviors and break habits but if we're serious about change we have to walk the talk. And keep right on walking as long as it takes until we get to a plastic-free world.

Janet Holt

Plastic Free July Day 31: Net Zero

The term "net-zero" has many definitions depending on what is referenced: business, manufacturing, or individuals, for example. They all refer to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to halt climate change; specifically, achieving a balance between the carbon emitted into the atmosphere, and the carbon removed from it. On a personal level, what can we do?

First of all, it's almost impossible to achieve net-zero, and that's okay. The challenge is to be aware of what we CAN do to get closer to that goal of reducing carbon emissions. Some are big goals: trading a gas-guzzler for an electric car or installing solar panels on your home. But many are easy:

--use less electricity
--reduce gasoline consumption
--eat less meat
--use less plastic

Notice what all of these have in common? LESS. Use less. Every little bit counts. Click here for a Canadian video about zero waste that might inspire you.

We have thoroughly enjoyed writing the daily posts for Plastic Free July and hope we have inspired you to think more about the choices you make in your daily lives. Thanks to all of you who sent in your comments. With her permission, we are attaching an e-mail received from Sam Stout about the things she is doing to be a "good guest" of our planet. We'd love to hear from more of you about any of the changes or decisions you've made so we can share your stories, too.

July is over but our commitment to moving towards Net Zero continues. Watch for more posts and activities from the Green Team in the coming months to help keep us mindful of how interconnected we are on this small planet. A statement that stood out in a video about the extent of the plastic problem was this one: "Everybody knows [the problem.] The real problem is getting everybody to care." Let's live the 7th principle of our UU faith—Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part—and lead the way.

Reduce. Reuse. Repurpose. Refuse. Recycle.

Janet Holt and Deanna Tolliver

e-mail from Sam Stout:

Some of the things I am trying to do to be a good guest of this planet:

- I have also used wool balls in my dryer about 3-4 years. Love them. They work
- Have small hands-free covered trash can that I put by each kitty box. I scoop into that, then day of trash dump the cans into a plastic bag. That way I use only 1 plastic bag a week instead of 14.
- Have been back to recycling every Thursday now that the man is back on Farmers' Market day. He parks at the Woodlands.
- Have been using homemade laundry soap for many years. About $2 every 5 months. Cleans clothes beautifully.
- Use my own shopping bags; love the veg/fruit bags. Got them from UUVC.
- Have my stainless-steel water bottle (UUVC) so no plastic there. Joe likes his "plastic" but reuses his heavier plastic bottles over and over (cleaning with soap and water after each use).

There are other things that I am doing to help the planet (thinking part of brain not fully engaged this am). Am walking to dog park and back every morning instead of driving. Save on emissions. Good for dog and Sam. (:

Your ideas have been great. Thanks for the time and effort into the articles. As I read them, I realize I am doing more things to help the planet than I thought. It does feel good to know every little thing we do is one less mark against our planet. Still have a long ways to go.

Sam