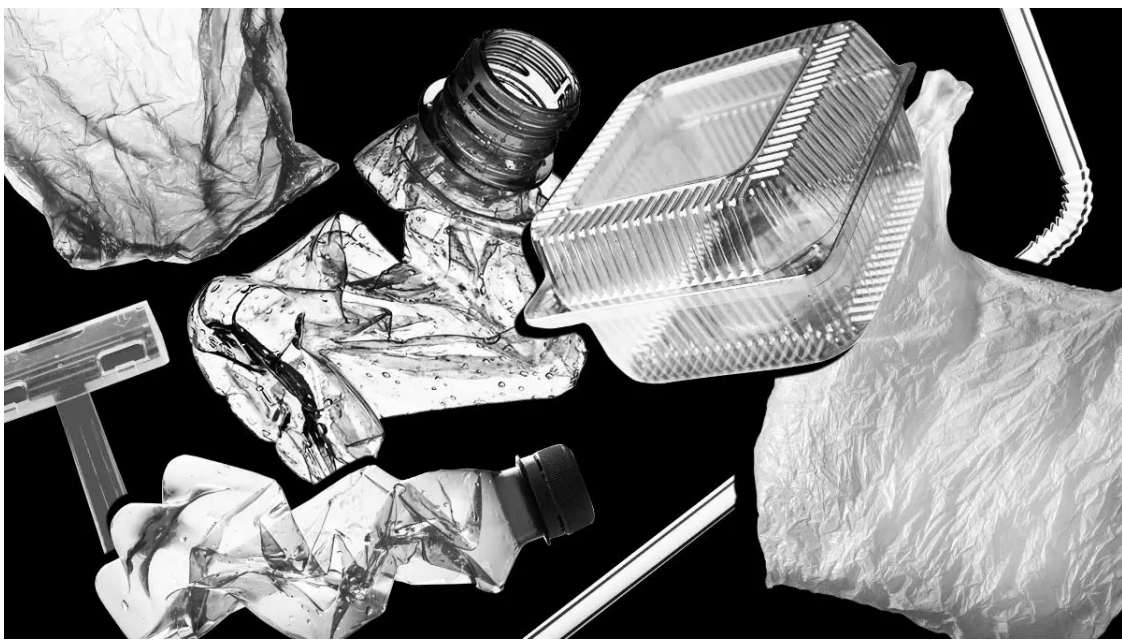


# How to Quit Plastic

Ways to reduce this kind of waste—and its environmental impact—right now

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*PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION: LACEY BROWNE/CONSUMER REPORTS, ISTOCK*

Like going on a diet, the first step in reducing the amount of single-use plastic we discard is to understand how much we really consume. Judith Enck, president of Beyond Plastics, a nationwide anti-plastic campaign, suggests looking at the plastic we throw away on a daily basis for an honest assessment of our consumption and for clues to how we can make the most impact. “I saw that I used a lot of Keurig pods, so I switched to using a French press,” Enck says. “My husband is a big orange juice drinker, so now we use frozen concentrated juice,” to avoid plastic jugs and cartons.

You don't need to become an eco-warrior overnight. "Take it one product at a time, and work your way up," says Deb Singer, the leader of the plastic bag ban at Whole Foods and co-founder of BRINGiT reusable shopping bags. "Starting with one thing makes it more palatable to make other changes."

In addition to personal actions, you can push for producer responsibility laws that slow the flow of plastic at its source. "With plastic pollution, the tap is overrunning," says Mariana Del Valle Prieto Cervantes, water equity and ocean program manager at GreenLatinos, which focuses on environmental, natural resource, and conservation issues that affect the Latino community in the U.S. "We have to turn off the tap before we can clean up this mess."

## Bags



5,000,000,000,000,000

plastic bags are used worldwide every year.  
They can last more than 500 years.

## Do First

**Bring your own reusable bags and refuse plastic ones.** BRINGiT makes eco-friendly compostable cellulose bags, but just about any reusable bag is better than a single-use plastic bag. Each reusable bag could cancel out hundreds to thousands of plastic bags.

**Use mesh cloth bags for your produce.** Try to avoid fruits and vegetables packed in plastic wrap or clamshells.

## Do More

**Kick your zipper food-storage bag habit.** Use reusable silicone or paper-based bags instead.

**Avoid plastic poop bags for your dog's waste.** Use paper-based alternatives or a pooper scooper if you have a yard.

**Stop using trash bags.** If you compost food waste, use a garbage disposal, and recycle aluminum and glass products, what's left should be innocuous enough to go straight into the trash bin.

## Food Containers



37%

The U.S. accounted for 37 percent of the world's food service disposables in 2010.

## Do First

**Take your own empty containers** to restaurants for leftovers.

**Cut back on takeout.** Dine in at restaurants, and cook at home more often. If ordering delivery, request that condiment packets, cutlery, and straws be excluded.

**Avoid foods wrapped in plastic.** At a supermarket deli, ask for your order to be wrapped in paper (or take your own container). If you do buy something in a plastic container, get only the packaging marked 1 or 2 on the bottom, Enck says. “Those can actually be recycled.”

## Do More

**Avoid prepackaged foods.** Take empty containers from home to fill up with pasta, grains, and nuts. If what you need isn’t available in bulk, opt for a brand that uses paper, glass, or metal packaging.

## Beverages



21-34 billion

plastic beverage bottles end up in the ocean each year.

## Do First

It's pretty easy to switch from buying your soda in plastic bottles to buying it in cans,” Del Valle Prieto Cervantes says.

**Take a reusable coffee cup, travel mug, or glass jar to the coffee shop.** (Know how many ounces it holds so that you can be charged accordingly.) “If you forget your cup, ask for your order to be made ‘for here’ in a mug,” says Dagny Tucker, founder of Vessel, a reusable coffee cup return system operating in Berkley, Calif., and Boulder, Colo. If you must use a throwaway cup, at least decline the lid.

## Do More

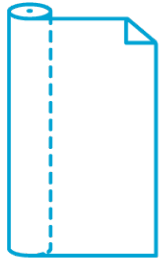
**Carry a reusable water bottle and refill it with tap water.** Using a reusable water bottle instead of buying and recycling water bottles can reduce your global warming impact by as much as 98 percent.

**Use your own glass, metal, or silicone straw.** Or just use your lips to sip!

**Make your own sparkling water with a soda maker.** It'll also save you money in the long run.

**Avoid plastic tea bags.** Those fancy pyramid-shaped tea bags release microplastics into your brew and can wind up in landfills. Choose loose leaf or paper bags instead.

## Wraps and Film



# 196 Million

Number of Americans who reported using at least one roll of plastic wrap in the last six months (2020)

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## **Do First**

**Stop using plastic wrap.** Use stretchy silicone covers, beeswax wraps, or aluminum foil to wrap foods. Or simply put the food in a bowl and cover it with a plate.

**Shop local instead of ordering online.** “If I’m ordering something online, I add a note requesting they not use plastic packaging,” Del Valle Prieto Cervantes says. “Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.”

## **Do More**

**Shop the frozen food aisle sparingly.** Just about everything you find there is wrapped in plastic, even if the exterior packaging is cardboard.

**Buy in bulk or bake it yourself.** Purchasing fewer snack packs or individually wrapped foods—such as chips, cookies, and granola bars—will help reduce plastic waste.

## Cleaning and Personal Care



158,100,000

Americans used disposable razors in 2020

## Do First

**Stop buying products packaged in plastic.** Buy soap, shampoo, detergents, and cleaning products packaged in paper, glass, or aluminum.

**Ditch plastic razors.** Use a metal razor with replaceable blades instead.

**Opt for natural sponges** instead of synthetic sponges when hand-washing dishes.

**Avoid exfoliating scrubs and toothpastes** with microbeads, which are tiny plastic balls.

## Do More

**Stop using sanitizing and flushable wipes.** These are often made of plastic fibers that clog sewers and don't degrade in landfills.

**Consider using cloth diapers.** To reduce environmental impact, get them secondhand, wash them with full loads, and air-dry if possible.

**Avoid plastic tampons and pads.** Use all-cotton pads and tampons with cardboard applicators and paper wrapping, or a menstrual cup or period underwear.