



JULY CHALLENGE: OUR PLASTIC PROBLEM

Once you start noticing how much unnecessary plastic we use every day, the scale of our plastic problem starts to become enormously worrying. We can't eliminate all the unnecessary plastic from our lives in one challenge, but we'll start trying.

One very valid point that is frequently raised is that corporations who use plastic packaging push the onus of reducing plastic use on to the consumers, when, in fairness, that responsibility should lie on their shoulders.

If the corporations stopped churning out products wrapped in single-use plastic, our plastic problem would basically cease to exist. Unfortunately, corporations only care about making money. Researching, testing, and switching to more eco-friendly packaging would put a dent in their profits. And, even though in the long run, it could win them more customers, corporations fear that passing that expense on to customers would drive them over to the competition.

Ideally, the people we elect to run our governments would actually have their citizens' best interests at heart. If they did so, banning corporations from using plastic packaging would immediately solve our plastic problem. If no corporation was allowed to use plastic packaging, no corporation would risk losing customers/money to their competition.

Unfortunately, governments are sadly usually more beholden to corporations than to citizens. Which is why, as unfair as it may be, the burden of avoiding single use plastic comes to rest on the shoulders of the consumers.



PART 1: WHY PLASTIC IS AN ISSUE

MOST PLASTIC IS RUBBISH

79% of the plastic on the planet is in landfills or clogging up our lakes, oceans, rivers, etc. At least 8 million tons of plastic waste ends up in the oceans each year¹. In fact, the world's plastic waste is enough to bury Manhattan two miles deep. "At some point we will run out of room to put it," says Chelsea Rochman². "Some may argue we already have as now it's found in every nook and cranny of our oceans." There is literally a ton of plastic garbage for every person on the planet³.

THERE'S TOO MUCH OF IT

In 1950, when plastic was first mass produced, 2 million tons were manufactured. That figure has risen to 8.3 billion this year and is projected to reach 34 billion by 2050. A million plastic bottles are bought around the world every MINUTE, a number that is expected to rise by 20% by 2021⁴. By 2050, it's predicted there will be more plastic waste than fish in our oceans⁵.

PLASTIC KILLS

All sorts of marine animals - dolphins, whales, seals, birds, fish - as well as creatures on land become entangled in our plastic waste, are injured by it, suffocate in it, are poisoned

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/whopping-91-percent-plastic-isnt-recycled/>

² <https://weather.com/science/environment/news/world-plastic-waste-pollution>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/07/19/theres-literally-a-ton-of-plastic-garbage-for-every-person-in-the-world/?utm_term=.4106aa6977c0

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jun/28/a-million-a-minute-worlds-plastic-bottle-binge-as-dangerous-as-climate-change>

⁵ <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/science/ct-un-conference-on-oceans-20170605-story.html>



by it, choke on it, etc. For example, a whale found dying off the coast of Norway was found to have 30 plastic bags, amongst other plastic rubbish, in its gut⁶. This was far from an isolated incident.

PART 2: WHAT WE CAN DO

As with everything in the battle against climate change, a key factor is being a conscious consumer. You can start by doing a single-use plastic edit of each room of your house. What are you buying that comes wrapped in single-use plastic? What can you substitute for those products instead? Here are some ideas to get you started.

SCRAPPING SINGLE USE PLASTIC

1. Say no to plastic straws. Better yet, ask your local restaurants/bars/cafes to stop automatically serving straws with drinks.
2. Use bar shampoo and conditioner rather than bottled.
3. Give up gum and cigarettes - both contain plastic and are common litter.
4. If there is a product that comes in plastic or one that comes in a cardboard box - think pasta, detergent, etc - buy the one in cardboard.
5. Bring your own reusable containers and buy from bulk bins.
6. Use reusable bottles and cups, not single use plastic ones.
7. Don't use disposable plastic dining ware.
8. If you have kids, use washable cloth diapers.
9. Plastic shopping bags... please just don't use them. Ever.

⁶<https://metro.co.uk/2017/02/03/stranded-whale-dies-with-more-than-30-plastic-bags-stuck-in-its-stomach-6425059/>



10. Buy produce loose rather than wrapped in plastic. Use reusable produce bags rather than the plastic bags provided at the shop.

DITCHING PLASTIC IN ANY FORM

Once you've tackled single-use plastic, you can start looking at products that aren't single-use but are also made of plastic. For example, kids' toys, Tupperware, shower curtain rings, your dog's food bowls, etc. Don't toss things out, but just try to avoid buying new things in plastic when you could get them made of a more eco-friendly substance.

If you are using plastic containers for leftover food or your children's lunches, it is advisable to repurpose those items for other uses. The chemicals in plastic can leach into your food and drinks so it's best to avoid using those altogether as plastic disrupts your endocrine system.

PLOGGING

Sweden has come up with an excellent hobby for those who like to walk or jog. Just bring along a bag with you (and perhaps some gloves or gel) and pick up any litter you find while you're out and about. Participating in volunteer clean-ups are also an excellent way to remove dangerous plastic litter from your area. It's especially easy to see on a beach how much plastic - especially tiny little pieces that have been broken down - is lurking in our poor little planet.



PART 3: LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS

As this challenge only runs during the month of July via The Kin Project, it is definitely worth following zero waste experts year round to keep your plastic use to a minimum. Dig around till you find one whose writing you enjoy and it will make the whole process easier! Here are some ideas:

<https://www.goingzerowaste.com/>

<https://meredithtested.com/>

<https://oldworldnew.us/>

<https://zerowastehome.com/>

<https://www.tinyyellowbungalow.com/>

<https://www.therogueginger.com/>

<https://reducereuserenewblog.com/>

<https://trashisfortossers.com/>

<https://zerowastechef.com/2017/05/28/start-here/>

<https://zerowastenerd.com/>

<https://naturesnurtureblog.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/zero.waste.collective/>