

Forever Plastic

From the water we drink to the food we eat, and the waste we generate, plastic has infiltrated our lives. Each year, about 300 million tons of plastic is produced globally. Of that, 150 million tons per year are generated due to our consumption of single use plastic products—water bottles, plastic grocery bags, food film packaging, straws, and polystyrene cups and food containers, which end up polluting our oceans, food sources, and other natural habitats. *We can have a major impact on reducing this plastic waste stream by refusing disposable plastics.*

Plastic is not only everywhere, it lasts forever. Several billion tons of accumulated plastic now fouls the planet, clogging landfills, polluting waterways, littering landscapes and contaminating the ocean, including the fish we eat. **Each year**, 8 million tons of plastic end up in the ocean, some of it circulating in huge gyres in the middle of the ocean. These floating patches of marine plastic can extend for thousands of square miles just below the surface. Larger pieces are often ingested by sea turtles and sea birds or entangle air breathing marine mammals, leading to death by starvation or suffocation. But what is most insidious about marine plastics is that they consist, for the most part, of fragments of weathered plastic, made brittle by UV light. These continue to break down over time into micro plastics which infiltrate the plankton and contaminate food chains.

While the ability to recycle plastics has increased with improved technology, only 10% of what is produced each year is recycled. This is the result of several factors, including inadequate policies and infrastructure, co-mingling of different plastic products in waste streams making recycling an increasingly expensive proposition (see the link to the article about China refusing to accept the West's trash) and the sheer volume of cheap and available plastic products. This puts a premium on reducing demand **at the outset** for single use/disposable plastic products. We can start right now by eliminating light weight plastic bags altogether from our shopping—including for produce at the grocery store. Many communities and several countries—including Bangladesh, Rwanda, China, Taiwan, Macedonia, and now Kenya--have actually banned lightweight plastic bags. If they can do it, so can we. We are an affluent, intelligent community, and according to US News and World Report, the most highly educated in the country! Let's display some creative thinking and concern for the environment by coming up with alternatives to disposable plastics and eliminating them from our households.

Here are some suggestions to get going:

- Use mesh or cloth bags for purchases of produce in bulk (goo.gl/d4Y6dv)
- Use only compostable garbage bags for compost and these or biodegradable bags for trash going to landfill (goo.gl/2ZPLPJ)
- When buying carry out, ask first if they use paper/cardboard. Don't accept plastic and tell them why.
- At the meat or fish counter, ask for paper only, and bring along your newspaper sleeves to use as outer packaging (a great way to recycle these!)
- Talk to store managers about your desire for less plastic packaging and what they can do to get manufacturers to reduce this
- Get informed—go online, speak to county officials, find out what others are doing--and get involved
- Be sure to take any plastic bags you do collect to your grocery store for recycling.

We invite you to contribute your own suggestions by emailing either Marilyn Bracken or Marea Grant, Co-Chairs of the Environment & Energy Committee.

Some informative sites are included below:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/06/plastic-fibres-found-tap-water-around-world-study-reveals>

https://www.fauna-flora.org/news/plastic-pollution-disposable-life?gclid=Cj0KCQiAnOzSBRDGARIsALmUB1JMriEy8q746PLxlx5JjvJmgeo92NbyBa3UMvnQIH23q2Nt6ber6EaAmjDEALw_wcB

<http://plastic-pollution.org/>

<http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/>

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/world/china-recyclables-ban.html?_r=0

Plastics Pile Up as China Refuses to Take the West's Recycling

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By KIMIKO de FREYTAS-TAMURA JAN. 11, 2018



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Officials in Britain and the West are scrambling to cope with growing piles of plastics like this one in China. Beijing banned the import of many recyclables on Jan.1. Fred Dufour/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images