

# LIVING WITH LESS PLASTIC

## THE BIG PLASTIC COUNT

### HANDBOOK



## WELCOME

This guide will help you take action to reduce the amount of plastic in your life. It's for anyone who's feeling overwhelmed about the amount of plastic in the world and wants to do more to use less. If you've just taken part in The Big Plastic Count, you may already have some ideas about which household plastics you could tackle first. But if you're not sure, the good news is you can find out everything you need to get started right here in this guide.

## GOVERNMENTS, BRANDS AND BUSINESSES MUST ACT TOO

When it comes to plastic, governments, big brands and supermarkets need to step up and provide reusable alternatives that everyone can use and afford. They have the power to make the big changes that are needed. But that doesn't mean individuals aren't powerful too: the changes we make to reduce our own plastic footprint can make a real difference. So read on for simple tips and affordable swaps.

# GETTING STARTED: KEEP IT SIMPLE AND REMEMBER, SMALL CHANGES DO ADD UP

- If you took part in The Big Plastic Count, have a look at some of the plastic types you counted most over the week and consider starting with them.
- Start small. Make just one or two changes at a time and build up bit by bit. Sometimes plastic items are genuinely essential, and no one should feel guilty about using them. But for those who are able to, cutting out a few bits here and there can have a big impact on plastic pollution without having a big impact on your life.
- There's no need to throw out products you already own. If you already have something in the cupboards, use it up first before replacing it.
- Celebrate your wins. We lead busy lives and our different circumstances can affect our ability to change how we use plastic. If you forget your reusable bottle or cup one day, don't feel disheartened and give up. Be proud of yourself for the other days when you do remember.
- Remember, small changes really do add up. As zero-waste chef Anne-Marie Bonneau said, **"We don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly."**
- This could mean that you're bringing reusable bags to the supermarket (well done!) but still need to use food wrapped in plastic.



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## WHEN REDUCING PLASTIC ISN'T POSSIBLE

Around 15% of the world's population, that's about 14.1 million people in Britain, have a disability. Many of them need single-use plastic items to live independently. Pre-made and pre-peeled food is vital for people with accessibility issues who find chopping and peeling difficult or impossible. Online shopping and home deliveries, which are often delivered in layers of plastic packaging, can be a necessary lifeline.

For many people with a disability, it's not possible to switch to reusables. Take plastic straws – their flexibility can be a key function that alternative materials can't provide. Metal/glass straws can even pose a safety risk,

and the constant washing of reusable straws can be a struggle. That's why we need the government to ensure that reusable alternatives cater to everyone's needs, and commit to a 50% reduction in single-use plastic.

The environmental movement should be for everyone. And if there are tips or ideas in this guide that don't fit in with your current needs, that's ok. Do what you can. Every effort makes a difference and there's definitely no pressure to switch out single-use items if you rely on them. There are plenty of other ways you can help reduce plastic production. Sign petitions, write to your local MP or join a local Refill Scheme or community group.

# TAKING ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

Reducing our own plastic consumption where possible is a great way to take action. Encouraging others to do the same by using our voices as activists is also an incredibly important way to catalyse change. Here are our suggestions for things you can do in the community and beyond.

- **Join forces with like-minded people** in your area to stop plastic pollution. Local community groups can connect you with amazing projects. There may be a local **Refill Scheme** to help power the #RefillRevolution, or try checking out your nearest Greenpeace local group.
- **Sign petitions** – they work, because they put pressure on governments and big brands to do the right thing, and hold them to account when it comes to reducing plastic.

- **Write to your local MP** and ask them to do more to tackle the problem of single-use plastic in your community and to promote accessible refill and reuse systems.
- **Visit City to Sea's Plastic-Free Living Hub** for more tips and advice.
- **Take part in Plastic Free July**, the perfect opportunity to put some of these tips into action, and encourage your friends and family to join you.
- **Share your living with less plastic journey** on social media using #livingwithlessplastic
- **Follow @GreenpeaceUK and @EverydayPlastic** to stay up to date with The Big Plastic Count and other news.
- **Get involved with World Refill Day.**



Local environmental group cleaning up the beach in Glasgow.

# WELCOME TO THE REFILL REVOLUTION

Single-use plastics are designed to be discarded. Not only can they end up in the ocean and wash up on beaches, but they also get sent to other countries and then dumped or burned. This can seriously impact public health, and poorer communities and communities of colour feel the effects of this the most.

It's time to stem the flow from the source. If we don't buy single-use plastic in the first place, then disposing of it won't be a problem. Refill. Reuse. Whenever possible. Look out for zero-waste shops or retailers where you can refill your own containers rather than buying things in single-use packaging.

Every time we make a change like this – choosing reuse over single-use – it's a step away from disposable culture and a step closer to the big refill revolution we need. Shopping in this way doesn't need to be more expensive either. This guide shows you how to get your groceries without plastic and without a big shopping bill.

Reusing and refilling means less plastic polluting our seas and beaches, less damage to our health, and a reduction in greenhouse gases that speed up climate change. It may feel like changing your day-to-day actions is just a drop in the ocean, but if we do what we can to reduce single-use plastic, together it can add up to real change.

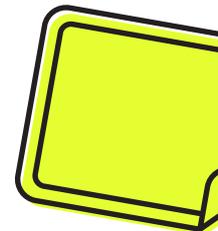
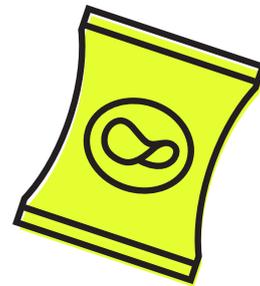
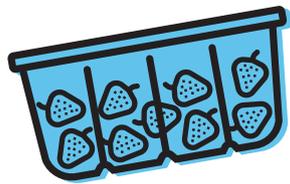
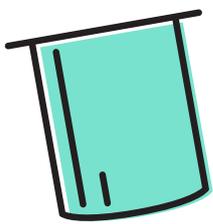
## THE TOP FIVE: CUTTING DOWN ON PLASTIC ONE STEP AT A TIME

Feeling overwhelmed? Don't worry. Start with our top five tips from this guide. Choose one you think could work for you, and get cracking.

1. Buy a reusable water bottle and a reusable coffee cup, and say goodbye to single-use plastic drink packaging forever. Save waste and money!
2. Choose unwrapped options when you shop for your fruit and veg wherever you can.
3. Save glass jars, takeaway tubs and other containers to refill with loose products, store leftovers, or to carry a packed lunch.
4. Carry a reusable bag, like a tote, rucksack or bag for life, when doing your shopping.
5. Download the **free Refill app** and find nearby places to refill your water bottle, coffee cup or lunchbox, and find plastic-free shopping options.



A refill shop in Oxford.



## HOME WINS

This section is all about finding alternatives to the plastic we use at home. If you took part in The Big Plastic Count, you're probably now pretty familiar with the types of plastic you use at home. If you didn't, no problem! We've broken it down by room, so you can take this guide with you on a tour of your home and see what plastic items you could swap or change once they need replacing.

## THE BATHROOM

The perfect place to get started on your plastic-reducing journey. The bathroom is home to many single-use plastics and the starting place of around 6% of marine plastic that ends up on our beaches after getting flushed down our toilets. Remember that the three Ps — pee, poo and paper — are the only things that should ever be flushed down the loo.

### Some of the most polluting bathroom items

- **Wet wipes.** The third most common type of litter found on beaches in the UK in 2020. Many people with disabilities rely on using wet wipes to stay clean. So it's important to remember that, despite what many of them say on the packet, wet wipes should NOT be flushed down the toilet.
- **Plastic bottles.** The average household uses a whopping 216 plastic haircare bottles every year.\*



### What you can do

1. **Swap bottles for bars.** Lots of bathroom essentials like soap, shower gel, shampoo and conditioner are available in bar form. There are lots of high-quality and affordable options out there, and they're becoming more available in high street shops and supermarkets.
2. **Choose recycled toilet paper that isn't wrapped in plastic.** Instead go for paper-wrapped loo roll, which is widely recycled and breaks down easily. These options can now be found in some supermarkets as well as online.
3. **Refill.** If bars aren't for you, save your empty bottles and refill them instead. So many brilliant brands now offer shampoo, conditioner and soap refills at zero-waste shops and even at some supermarkets.
4. **Use a bamboo toothbrush.** Dental care can create a lot of plastic waste: in the UK, we throw away around **200 million plastic toothbrushes each year.** Switching to a bamboo toothbrush, which is a natural material that breaks down easily, is a cheap and straightforward way to help do something about that.
5. **Choose reusable wipes and makeup pads.** Pads made from natural fibres can be washed and reused. They may cost more than disposable pads initially, but you'll save money in the long run as they can be used time and time again.

\* One Poll/RÉDUIT

## THE KITCHEN

Another single-use plastic hotspot, with fridges and cupboards often stuffed full of plastic packaging.

UK supermarkets are putting more plastic on their shelves than ever before, using 114 billion pieces of single-use plastic a year.



A household's plastic waste collected over one year.

© Ollie Harrop / Everyday Plastic

### What you can do

Some of the tips for the bathroom can be used in the kitchen too. Here are a few more to get you started:

1. **Save takeaway containers.** After enjoying a tasty takeaway, reuse the free plastic containers for leftovers and lunches.
2. **Choose unwrapped fruit and veg** where possible. Or you could try a veg box scheme and get it delivered straight to your door. Fruit and veg boxes have the added advantage of being seasonal and local, which means less food air miles.
3. **Shop local.** Markets, bakeries, fishmongers and greengrocers usually use less packaging and can be cheaper too.
4. **Get your milk delivered.** Local or online milk delivery services often use glass bottles not plastic cartons. Most also offer plant milks and other items like butter and bread, which can save on a trip to the supermarket.
5. **Stock up on loose store cupboard essentials.** Supermarkets may be full of plastic packaging, but there are other shops that aren't! **Use the Refill app** to find places near you that offer food, drink, groceries and other household products in refillable or plastic-free packaging. Items that work out cheaper (or at least the same price) to buy in a refill shop include rice, pasta, sugar and flour. Why not use old jam jars as containers to cut even more waste!

## CLEANING UP

Keeping our homes clean often means using lots of plastic bottles, disposable cloths and wipes, and toxic chemicals. It doesn't have to be this way. These tips will help you keep your home sparkling clean while avoiding single-use plastic where you can.

### What you can do

1. **Use a dish soap bar.** Washing-up liquid doesn't have to be liquid! Choosing a dish soap bar means less plastic, and could work out cheaper too as it lasts longer.
2. **Make your own cloths.** Instead of using plastic-wrapped synthetic cloths and dusters that are thrown away after a few uses, make your own washable ones by cutting up bedding or clothes that are too worn to be donated.
3. **Make your own products.** Try mixing vinegar, water, lemon and bicarbonate of soda for a natural cleaner that works a treat... and keeps plastics, toxins and costs down.
4. **Refill.** If you don't fancy making your own cleaning products, keep bottles and refill them at your local zero-waste store. **Use the Refill app** to find your nearest stockists.



# THE WARDROBE

Did you know that our wardrobes can be a hidden source of plastic pollution? Many of our clothes are made from polyester and other synthetic materials which shed microfibres – tiny bits of material made of plastic – in the wash, causing plastic pollution in our oceans.

From the summit of **Mount Everest** to the depths of the **oceans**, microplastics have been found across the planet. Shockingly, they've even been detected in human blood. A **recent study** found that there have been 12 types of microplastic detected, which are commonly found in packaging, bottles, clothing, rope and twine, and many manufacturing processes.

The average lifecycle of a garment is just **3.3 years**, but the average polyester product is likely to last **200 years in landfill**.

## What you can do

By changing how you wash, care for and shop for clothes, you can stop your wardrobe contributing to plastic pollution and impacting our health. Here are some ways to get started:

1. **Wash your clothes less.** Do you really need to wash that pair of jeans or jumper after just a couple of wears? We're in the habit of chucking yesterday's clothes in the laundry basket, but airing your clothes may well do the trick – they'll last longer and this will save you money in the long run too.
2. **Spin less.** Check if you can reduce the spin setting on your washing machine or, if you have the time, consider handwashing instead to minimise microfibre shedding.
3. **Get swapping.** Clothes swapping with friends is a great way to keep your wardrobe fresh and save money, while avoiding fast fashion and plastic packaging.
4. **Stop buying clothes made of man-made and synthetic materials.** Instead, opt for clothes that are made with natural fibres.
5. **Buy second-hand clothes.** Head down to your local charity shop and have a rummage for outfits. Second-hand options will be cheaper and reduce the amount of plastic packaging created from fast fashion and its supply chain.
6. **Repurpose old garments and mend clothes.** This gives them a longer life and avoids fast fashion – one of the most polluting and damaging industries that generates huge amounts of plastic.



Clothes-swapping event.

## POST, DELIVERIES AND ONLINE SHOPPING

Many of us shop online and get our purchases delivered. If you do, you'll probably have noticed how much packaging arrives with every order, only to end up going straight in the bin. Avoiding plastic from online orders can be tricky, but following these tips will go some way to help.

The pandemic saw more people shopping online and, as a result, an increase in the e-commerce **plastic packaging market**, which is forecast to continue growing in coming years.

### What you can do

1. **Shop local.** Where possible, avoid online shopping with big retailers and choose local independent shops instead, many of which offer packaging-free options, wrap in newspaper and even deliver by bike.
2. **Buy in bulk** when shopping online, rather than little and often. This not only saves on packaging, but travel miles and petrol too.
3. **Collect instore where possible.** This can cut out the use of plastic and packaging used for delivery and also helps support your local high street.
4. **Reuse packaging.** Keep boxes and bags that were sent to you for your own posting. This saves you money and reduces unwanted plastic packaging.
5. **Swap bubble wrap for tissue or newspaper.** It's cheaper and creates less waste at every stage.
6. **Choose fabric, brown paper or old newspapers to wrap presents** instead of purpose-made wrapping paper (which usually isn't recyclable). You can even get creative and decorate it with your own designs.
7. **Write on the packaging directly.** Avoid plastic tags, cards and stickers for a completely plastic-free parcel.



Mother and son wrapping presents using fabric at a Zero-Plastic event.

## ON THE GO

- In the UK, 2.5 billion coffee cups are thrown away each year: that's enough to stretch around the world roughly five and a half times. **Less than 1 in 400 (just 0.25%) are recycled.**
- Our 'lunch on the go' habit here in the UK generates 11 billion items of packaging waste a year. This amounts to **276 items per person!**

Cutting back on single-use plastic at home is an excellent start, but it doesn't stop there. Making changes while you're out and about can be more straightforward than you think – and we've got more handy tips and ideas to help you every step of the way.



© Will Barker / City to Sea

A refillable drinks bottle.

### What you can do

1. **Carry a reusable water bottle.** Invest in a reusable bottle and stop buying bottled water if you can. You'll save plastic and money in the long run.
2. **Invest in a reusable cup.** If you enjoy a takeaway coffee most mornings, it could be worth investing in a reusable coffee cup. Some cafes even offer a discount or reward for bringing your own.
3. **Bring a packed lunch or leftovers.** This is a great way to reduce plastic and also save the pennies when eating on the go. Use old takeaway boxes, butter or soup tubs or even jars to store and transport your lunch.
4. **Pack a cutlery set** and you can picnic or eat takeout food without using disposable plastic knives or forks. As consumers we have the power to affect supply and demand, so every person that refuses plastic cutlery helps reduce future orders by that shop or cafe.
5. **Keep a small tote bag or foldaway shopping bag with you** for when you pop into the shops on your way home. By refusing a plastic bag you save yourself money every time – those 10ps can add up!

## THE REFILL APP

**Refill is an award-winning campaign to help people live with less waste.**

The **free Refill app** connects you to a global network of places to reduce, reuse and refill. Wherever you are, you can find places to refill your reusable coffee cup, get free drinking water, fill your lunchbox with food, or locate zero-waste shopping options near you using the app's map.

With more than 280,000 Refill Stations around the world, and almost 400,000 app downloads, Refill has created a wave of change and prevented millions

of pieces of plastic from entering our waste stream, protecting our oceans for future generations.

The Refill app puts consumer power at your fingertips. **Download it today for free** and start reducing the amount of plastic in your life.



Scan here to download the Refill app





# WORLD REFILL DAY - 16 JUNE

Join the refill revolution!

World Refill Day is an annual global campaign to stop plastic pollution and help people live with less waste.

Join thousands of everyday activists around the world by choosing to reuse. Carry your reusable water bottle. Find places to eat, drink and shop with less waste. Get involved on social media with the tag **#WorldRefillDay** and help inspire others to do the same.

We have the power to create a wave of change – because if we all take small actions at the same time, we can create a global movement. By choosing to reuse, we're saving millions of pieces of plastic. Together we can keep our environment, oceans, cities and communities plastic free for the future. **Find out more about how to get involved.**



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Waitress refilling a water bottle on World Refill Day.



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