

Plastics



Many people who are working to reduce their waste realize they need to take a specific look at the amount of plastic they use in their lives. Plastic is versatile, light, and cheap to produce, but it also causes a lot of harm to the environment and to people's health.

From a waste perspective, using plastic is not ideal because many kinds are not recyclable, and, even if they are, the products can only be recycled one or two times before they become trash. Durable items made of plastic are also less likely to be able to be repaired when they break.

Because it is so common, it can be hard to avoid plastic, but there are simple things you can do to cut out single-use plastic in your life.

Remember your reusable bags

Remember to pack everything in reusable grocery bags rather than single-use plastic bags. If you need an extra reminder, you can get a window cling to put on your car window, door, or whatever location is closest to where you store your bags. Order window clings and other educational resources at environmentalresources.hennepin.us/items

Since grocery delivery doesn't allow you to use your reusable bags, consider using it less frequently or setting it as a future goal if life circumstances make it hard for you to do your own shopping.



"One of the simplest things many people can do, but one of the hardest habits to start, is to bring your own bag. Many of us function on autopilot, and this includes going to the grocery store. I would try my best to leave my bags where I could find them before I went to the store – on the counter, on the doorknob, in my trunk, and I would almost always walk right past them! I started putting my reusable bags in the front seat of my car with me so I would have no excuse to forget them. Now after doing this for about 6 months, I've been able to remember my bags much better, but it takes a long time to start any new habit despite best intentions!"

- student

Replace disposables with reusables

To reduce waste, eliminate most of the disposable products you use. These products may feel convenient, but don't forget the time and money that goes into constantly replacing and disposing of them! Think about which of these common products you use and how they could be replaced.

- **Paper coffee cups:** Paper coffee cups usually have a plastic coating that makes them unacceptable for both recycling and organics recycling. Although the plastic coating provides insulation to keep your drink hot, it ends up making the paper coffee cup not recyclable. The #6 plastic lid isn't recyclable either because it's a low-value plastic. Remember to bring a reusable coffee mug when you get coffee to-go (some places even give you a discount!).
- **Paper towels and synthetic sponges:** Trade in single-use paper towels and sponges for an old-fashioned cloth rag and a scrubber brush or scraper. Not only are these more durable, they can be washed and reused over and over again.
- **Plastic baggies:** Use reusable containers or cloth snack bags instead. Reusable containers come in a variety of materials to suit your needs, including cloth, glass, metal, and silicone. Rigid containers are a great option to help protect your items from being crushed when taken on the go. Cloth snack bags are similar to plastic bags and help save space in your lunch bag.
- **Plastic grocery bags:** Keep a few reusable bags near the door, in your car, or in your purse or backpack so you always have some even if you make an unplanned stop. This will help you avoid accumulating plastic bags that you have to store or take to a drop-off for plastic film recycling.
- **Plastic produce and bulk food bags:** These can be avoided as well! If your grocery store accepts tare weights, you can use any container for your produce and bulk goods. Just remember to write down the weight before using them. If your store does not have the capability to separate these weights, use your own bag on items sold by count (for example: if limes are \$.50 each). You can also use a lightweight bag for other purchases sold by weight if you don't mind paying a little bit extra to avoid waste.
- **Plastic wrap:** Use reusable containers with lids for storing foods, place a plate over a bowl in the refrigerator or try an option like beeswax cloth to wrap your food or put over the top of your containers. A few common brands are Bee's Wrap and Abeego. Or you can try making your own (search the web for a tutorial).
- **Single use coffee pods:** Single-serve coffee makers such as Keurigs create a lot of waste with no recycling option. You can pull apart the little cup and compost the grounds, but no area recyclers accept the plastic or foil lid because they are too small to be recycled. If you already have a machine, try reusable pods, which are now widely available in stores and online.
- **Dryer sheets:** Swap out dryer sheets for reusable dryer balls. You can buy some or make your own (search online for a variety of types). You can also avoid static by hanging your clothes to dry. If you prefer your clothing to have a scent, use a homemade linen spray or keep a sachet of flowers, herbs, or cedar in your dresser. You can also use pieces of cloth soaked in vinegar and essential oil as a dryer sheet replacement. They can be stored in a glass jar to soak before and after the load of laundry is done drying. Just run them with a load and then put them back in the jar to be ready for the next use.

