



**TOGETHER
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REDUCE YOUR WASTE

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MATERIAL WASTE GUIDE



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Material waste is a global issue, and everyone is part of the waste cycle.

Every product has an environmental footprint – from extraction of resources, production, distribution, to disposal. And each stage along this product life cycle affects our air, water, and planet. We extract tons of material from the earth to create products that enrich our quality of life, and when we're finished using the products, most of them are discarded, and some of that material leaks back into our environment in the form of pollution. When thinking about waste, most people think about the disposal of materials, after you're done using them. Yet, waste can happen at any stage of a product's life.

All materials that are unwanted, unusable, or cannot be recycled are considered material waste, including plastic, rubber, leather, textiles, wood, and glass.

Materials like plastic are found everywhere - in our wallets, our homes, and our schools. Unfortunately, plastic often ends up in our rivers and our oceans.

PLASTIC IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

Plastic is a big problem. Getting rid of it is not the solution. Modern plastics offer many benefits to humanity – in fields as diverse as medicine, transportation, electronics and, yes, even conservation.

We know current alternatives to plastic would likely consume more natural resources and produce more pollution. But plastic waste poses a growing threat to Earth's critical ecosystems and species.

Every year, the world produces roughly 300 million tons of plastic, and 8-12 million tons of that plastic ends up in our ocean.

By 2025, the ocean will contain one ton of plastic for every three tons of fish – if we remain on our current path.

But these statistics tell only half the story. Plastic helps protect food by delaying spoilage, contamination and damage, thus reducing food waste (by up to 254,000 metric tons annually in the US alone). The less food we waste, the less resources are used to replace it, avoiding significant greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and depletion of water globally.

If we can't live without plastic, we must learn to live with it. We can begin by getting rid of some unnecessary plastic, such as plastic bags and straws, and recycling items after use. But we must also rethink how we source, design, manage and reuse plastic, and create an economy that demands products with higher recycled content. Then, we will be on a path to doing more with less.

THINK ABOUT TIMING

When grocery shopping, choose meat or produce that is appropriately packaged to last until you are ready to prepare it. Proper packaging will extend the shelf life of your purchases. Also consider frozen options when it comes to vegetables. They retain the same level of nutrients as fresh produce and last much longer.



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RESEAL TO REUSE

If you're planning to make several meals with something (like deli meat) choosing a re-sealable package can help keep it fresh, so the lunch sandwich on Friday is as good as the one you make on Monday.



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BE AN AMBASSADOR

Compost your organic waste and take the time to read your local guidelines on what materials can be accepted in your area because composting programs vary widely by location. Also, make sure to share this information with your office and community.

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN RECYCLE

Recycling programs vary by location, so be sure to check your local government's website to find a list of materials that are accepted. There may be information on additional collection programs available to you as well. Help others by posting signs at work and around your community to share this important information.



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REUSE TO REDUCE

Bring reusable bags to shop and reduce the use of plastic bags. And when you can, carry a reusable water bottle to re-fill on the go. **Click here to find water fill stations in your area.**

A close-up, vertical shot of a grey recycling bin. The bin's lid is open, revealing a bright orange interior. A white rectangular sign is mounted on the inside of the lid. The sign features a white recycling symbol on the left and a white outline of a plastic bottle on the right. Below these symbols, the text "Plastic Bottles Only" is printed in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The bin's interior has two large, circular orange openings at the bottom. The background is a plain, light grey wall.

Put up posters in your office, home, and community about what is recyclable, compostable, and what goes in the trash.



Where applicable, reuse leftover notepads by discarding used sheets. Ensure reusable mugs and glasses are available for use.

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A vertical stack of colorful ceramic dishes. At the top is a bright green mug with a handle. Below it is a large yellow bowl. Under the bowl are several plates stacked on top of each other, showing colors like yellow, green, orange, and red. Below the plates is another yellow bowl, followed by a red bowl. At the bottom are more plates in yellow and orange. The dishes are glossy and arranged in a slightly offset manner, creating a sense of depth. The background is plain white.

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Provide filtered water dispensers if possible or explore the possibility of installing a water purification system so your office can avoid using bottled water. Also, stock your office with reusable plates, bowls, silverware, mugs, and glasses rather than paper or plastic.



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DID YOU KNOW?

- We need 1.6 Earths to support the way we are currently living, as a global average. In the US, the per capita footprint is as much as six times larger than the Earth's capacity.
- 8 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean every year.
- It takes 95% less energy to recycle aluminum (cans, foil, and tins) and use it again than to extract brand new aluminum. And yet, we only recycle aluminum cans 67% of the time in the US.
- The US has a 9% plastics recycling rate, which ranks well below Europe (30%) and China (25%).
- In the US, packaging materials account for 13% of the waste that ends up in landfills.
- Paper and cardboard made from tree-based fiber account for the biggest share of packaging waste in the US. They're also the most recycled packaging materials: of the 38 million tons generated in 2012, 29 million tons (76%) were recycled.
- According to the EPA, an average of 4.4 pounds of waste was generated daily per person in the US in 2014.

What WWF Is Doing To Help

Together with ten of the world's leading consumer brands, WWF is working with industry to rethink the way we source materials by convening the **Bioplastic Feedstock Alliance**. The Alliance is committed to supporting the responsible development of plastics made from plant-based material, and helping to build a more sustainable future.

WWF works with these companies to guide the responsible selection and harvesting of materials such as sugar cane, soy, algae, and agricultural waste that can be used to make plastics. As the use of these renewable materials has grown, so has the opportunity to address their potential impacts on land use, food security, and biodiversity.

[Learn more here.](#)

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The Bioplastic Feedstock Alliance seeks to ensure that plant-based plastics are sourced from renewable materials whose production is responsibly managed, does not result in destruction of critical ecosystems, and provides environmental benefits with minimal negative impacts.

Erin Simon—
Director of Packaging and Material Science Program
World Wildlife Fund (WWF)



© Adriano Gambarini / WWF-Brazil

To recapture the valuable resources that are discarded each day, WWF created the **Cascading Materials Vision** which provides a platform to support a global system of efficient, cascading reuse of these secondary materials. The framework helps public and private sector organizations alike by facilitating the sourcing of materials through more consistent and standardized methods, overcoming the major industry barriers we face today. Using the power of collaboration, this initiative aims for a future where we do more with less.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



OTHER WAYS TO HELP

Engage your community

Your local shops care about your opinion and your shopping or dining experience. Ask restaurants that use disposable containers to have recycling and composting in store. Also ask them to go plastic free for takeaway and encourage their guests to bring their own containers instead.

Start a collection

Ask shops in your area if they will participate in a plastic bag recycling collection program.

Swap it

Organize a clothing or household goods swap at work, using a breakroom to “shop” your coworkers’ wares. Once a season, plan a day where everyone brings in their unwanted items for others to take, and donate any leftover items to charity.

Get creative

Find fun and new ways to reuse materials and give them another life.

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