

## Wrapped in Plastic

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Plastic, which comes from the Greek verb *plassein* that translates to “to mould or shape,” was invented and made popular in 1869 by John Wesley Wyatt. This new material offered an alternative from the natural resources humans were confined to, such as metal and wood, along with animal based resources such as ivory, coral



or bone. In plastic's infancy it was used to mimic ivory and turtle shells and it was used for items such as billiard balls, piano keys, combs and so on. Over the years, new plastic variants were developed. A large-leap occurred after the end of World War 2 where production exploded due to it being cheap, convenient and because it was easy to mass produce. This efficiency resulted in the rise of the “throw away” society we live in today.

A research article published in *Science Advances* 2017 titled “*Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made*” estimates that in 2015, all plastic that has ever been produced from raw materials amasses 6300 million metric tons. Further that from all that plastic only 9% has been recycled, 12% has been burned, and the remaining 79% has ended up in landfills or the environment. The researchers further project that if current habits continue, 12000 million metric tons of plastic will be in landfills or the environment by 2050. The article also goes on to mention that 42% (146 million tons) of all the plastic created in 2015 was for packaging. Building and construction materials (which are long-lived practical uses for plastic as opposed to single-use packaging) represent only 19% of the share. The situation is dire! Which has propelled many companies, cities and even countries to begin to tackle the issue...starting with the biggest culprit of single-use plastics such as shopping bags, packaging, straws and utensils. These common items, which we come across in our everyday lives, add convenience, but compared to the small amount of time they are in our hands, the time they last in landfills or the environment is an eternity.



**There are many small and easy ways that each person can reduce their plastic footprint, and yet make a huge difference:**

- A. Reusable coffee cups/mugs - Grab yourself a nice personal travel mug, you can get them in many styles and often coffee shops will offer discounts to people that use a reusable vessel
- B. Metal or glass water bottles - Ditching plastic water bottles is one of the best things you can do to reduce your footprint- Not only can you get very nice ones which are able to keep your water cold for hours, but refill stations are often easily found in public areas. Furthermore, the quality of your town water is monitored closely, while water bottling companies aren't bound by the same standards.
- C. Reusable shopping bags - The hardest thing about reusable shopping bags is remembering to take them into the store. However, they are extremely cheap and come in a variety of styles and materials. And with stores starting to charge for bags you'll save money in the long run as well reduce your plastic footprint. The reusable bags are also a much sturdier option for carrying your purchases. So many people are carrying these that they are traded around readily, and you never know, but another shopper might be willing to share! Finally, as a last resort, some stores offer paper bag options.

**Tips from the Land Between staff:**

- D. Personal care options - Shampoo bars are an excellent alternative to bottled versions and they often have no packaging. Look for stores that have a return/reuse/refill options for the containers for cosmetics such as creams, lotions and soaps. More and more specialty stores and health food stores offer these options. We hope that soon grocery stores will get on this wagon too.

- E. Produce and bulk shopping - You don't need produce bags, just put your loose produce in the cart. Alternatively, cloth drawstring bags are easy to sew and you can make them from old clothes too! They are becoming increasingly available in grocery stores. Also they don't add significant weight to your produce when placed on the scales at the checkout counters. You can even use old stockings or socks for produce. Also, try shopping at bulk stores where you can bring your own containers, this adds use to those plastic containers you already have stocked up.
- F. Litterless lunches – Bring your meals in reusable options such as containers and reusable snack/sandwich bags such as those made with beeswax. This also pairs well with the next tip: bring your own 'city kit' for take out when dining out- a kit has a take-out container, personal cutlery and a travel cup.
- G. Garbage disposal options - Use a biodegradable garbage bag and if you throw away wet materials that cannot be composted, you can line the bag with a standard plastic one; then when you visit the dump or put the garbage out, you can remove the biodegradable one and rinse and reuse the plastic one as a liner again and again.
- H. General tip - Just be a little more conscious of your purchasing habits every time you go to the store. Try to find items with the lowest amounts of packaging or wrapping and if it is difficult to avoid, look for bulk sizes, so that you can to maximize the volume to packaging ratio.

Many people might think that reducing waste is a daunting or difficult goal to achieve, but small steps work! You don't have to jump right in, just make a few minor changes that you can stick to at first, and over time new habits will be made. Also each step and each piece that is saved from the landfills is cumulative. In no time at all, you will have made a significant impact. In 2010 the average Canadian produced 32.85 kilograms (72.42 pounds) of plastic waste. With a few of the minor habit changes listed above a few pounds can easily be shaved off.

If you are having a hard time imagining that a person could generate that much plastic waste in one year, check out this news article about Daniel Webb. He is a British artist who kept every bit of plastic waste that he generated in 2017 which tallied up to 29 kilograms (63.93 pounds), very close to our Canadian average...and only 10% of it was recyclable. He made a wall of his plastic waste! See it here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/apr/17/i-kept-all-my-plastic-year-4490-items-forced-rethink>

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