



# **PLASTIC & WASTE REDUCTION GUIDE**

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# THE WHY

It's easy to ignore a problem when it seems like it's **far away**. Straws up a turtle's nose, bottles and nets floating in an ocean, mountains of plastic waste far away. But there are two big reasons for why we should worry about the plastic we produce and use.

## THE VOLUME

Our City's disposal systems are so good at taking away our trash that **we are rarely faced with the extremes of our own waste**. But Canadians produce **3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste each year** which is expected to quadruple by 2050.

This is a massive figure that we all have a hard time mentally envisioning. So if you want to get a better picture of just your own waste, **try saving up your trash for a month** and do a waste audit. This can also be helpful in identifying areas that you produce more waste (ie. plastic wrap, bottles, packaging, etc).

## THE RESULTS:

Plastic is made with such unbreakable ingredients that **they just don't degrade** like most things in nature. But they do break down into smaller and smaller pieces called **microplastics**. This is dangerous because **they release toxic chemicals** as they break down, and then once they're small enough, **they spread**. Plastics have been found everywhere including the depths of the Marianas Trench, rain falling from the sky, and even human stool, breaking down and continuing to release chemicals through the whole process.



# COMMON MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS

## **Myth: Most plastic is recycled.**

Actually, **less than 10%** of the 3.3 million tonnes of plastic that Canada uses is recycled!



## **Myth: All plastics are created equal**

There are 7 main kinds of plastic (shown in the recycle symbol). Each is made and used differently and the higher the number, the harder it is to recycle and the less valuable it is in terms of reuse. Also the more a plastic is recycled, the more difficult and the less valuable it becomes.

## **Myth: It's easy to recycle plastic**

Two main things make recycling difficult. The quality of the plastic (discussed above) and the extraction. Many products are made with lots of components that are glued together (toothpaste tubes use metal, plastic, and glue. Mailing packages have a paper or cardboard exterior and plastic bubble wrap inside). To recycle the item means separating the components into their different types before they can be processed for use in other items.

## **Myth: Biodegradable plastic is the solution**

It's better than many other plastics made with petroleum, but it still requires special facilities to break it down (which Lethbridge doesn't have). Plus the quantity of plastic that we use on a single use basis is still too much for even this to be sustainable.

## **Myth: Plastic breaks down in a few hundred years.**

We honestly don't know. Plastics have only been used since the 1940s but it is estimated common items like bottles will take at least 1000 years to decompose into organic matter. Plastic will disintegrate into smaller and smaller pieces called microplastics and they can be broken down by certain bacteria but the quantities that we are using and disposing is putting a **massive strain** on the environment.



[Find more Plastic Facts here.](#)





# QUICK NOTE

As a preface to this guide, it is by no means comprehensive in all that can be done to reduce plastic use. Nor is it perfect in eliminating plastic use entirely. Rather, it is **a guide for how to reduce single use or limited use plastics and replacing them with reusable, compostable, or extended use options.**

There are few perfect options and systems out there, but the persistent efforts of individuals makes a difference.

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."**

Margaret Mead

# KITCHEN SWAPS



This can be replaced with

- beeswax wraps (get these at Purple Carrot or Naturistas)
- food containers,
- damp cloths for letting dough rise
- jars
- empty yogurt containers

## Coffee pods



These can be replaced by using a

- French press coffee (*probably the easiest way to make coffee*)
- espresso maker
- pour over coffee
- Aeropress (makes espresso quality)



## Ziplock bags

These can be replaced with

- reusable plastic containers
- reusable silicone bags
- bento box
- beeswax wrap
- paper bags (not much better, but at least these degrade and decompose)

- Silicone mats (keeps food from sticking to the pan)
- Oil and some good ol' elbow grease afterward (it sucks when something get burnt on, but get those muscles working and take comfort in knowing that you didn't make any waste)

## Wax paper



# CLEANING SWAPS



## Sponges

These can be replaced with:

- an abrasive or soft cloth (easily rewashed and used again)
- natural sponges (grown in the sea)
- a cloth bag with soap nuts (check these out! very cool!)

Replaceable with

- brushes made with wood and natural fibers
- a cloth bag filled with soap nuts (check these out! very cool!)
- steel wool



## Scrub brush

## Spray bottles



Rather than replacing these, try to refill and reuse these bad boys. We've got some great cleaning recipes coming up!

# KITCHEN REFILL RECIPES!

## Liquid dish soap

- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1/2 cup white vinegar
- 1/2 cup Dr. Bronners Sal Suds
- 1 tablespoon kosher or sea salt
- 25 drops lemon (or other) oil

*For a thicker consistency, shred some bar soap and melt it together with the other ingredients in a pot*

## Dishwasher tabs

- 2 cups washing or baking soda
- 2 cups borax
- 1/2 cup coarse or epsom salt
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 15-20 drops of lemon essential oil

*Mix everything together, pack into a silicone or ice tray, and leave to dry for at least 24 hours before using!*

## Citrus Vinegar Concentrate

- jar full of orange, lemon, or lime peels
- 1-2 cups white distilled vinegar
- essential oil (optional)

*Place the two ingredients in a jar and let sit for 2-4 weeks. Dilute or use full strength. Grind the peels and use as garbage deodorizer.*

## Multi Purpose Spray

- 1/2 cup citrus vinegar concentrate
- 4 cups water
- 1 empty spray bottle

## Bathroom Cleaner

- Citrus vinegar concentrate
- spray bottle
- 25 drops lemon essential oil





# BATHROOM SWAPS



## Shampoo + conditioner

These can be replaced with:

- **shampoo and conditioner bars** (a little tricky to find the right ones but there are so many options!)
- or refill your bottles at Purple Carrot or Naturistas

## Razors

Getting these with replaceable heads is a start but

- **safety razors** use replaceable blades that are completely recyclable
- **Leaf razor** (it's pricey but it uses 2 razors, so it's a smoother shave)
- sugar **waxing and laser hair removal** are also options (why do we grow hair.... )



## Deodorant

Finding alternatives for plastic wrapped deodorant will take some trial and error but these are some options

- **homemade deodorant** (recipe below)
- **alum bar** (a salt block that can deodorize pit smells and is good for razor burn)
- go au naturel (why are we so obsessed with smelling good anyway?)

# BATHROOM SWAPS



## Q-tips

If you're using these for your ears, it might be better to get your doctor to do a refreshing flush (it's much safer for your ear drums too). But if you're using them for makeup or nail polish you can use:

- cotton wipes
- Qtips made from paper



## Toothpaste

Toothpaste tubes are particularly bad environmentally since they're often made with plastic and metal glued together and therefore can't be cleaned or recycled. Swap it out for:

- homemade toothpaste in a jar (recipe below)
- Tooth tabs (they're a bit odd so it may take some time to get used to them)

## Dental floss, toothbrush, mouth waste

The whole oral hygiene thing is very wasteful in general. But here are some options:

- Bamboo toothbrush (compost the handle, dispose of the bristles, some have compostable bristles)
- Silk floss in glass containers (Dental Lace has some great ones)
  - reuse dental floss until it breaks rather than tossing it.
- String could also be substituted, but be careful
- Homemade mouthwash (recipe below) or dissolvable mouthwash tablets





# BATHROOM REFILL RECIPES!

## Toothpaste

- 6 tbs coconut oil
- 4 tbs baking soda
- 20 drops of oil of oregano (an antiseptic)
- 20 drops of peppermint oil
- stevia to taste (optional)

*Mix everything together and place in a jar. Scoop or smear a bit on your toothbrush (a popsicle stick or small spoon helps)*



## Deodorant

- 1/4 cup baking soda
- 1/4 cup arrowroot powder or cornstarch
- 5 tbs coconut oil
- 10-20 drops essential oil

*Mix everything together, and put in a jar. Apply a small amount (a little goes a long way) onto those stinky pits with your finger. It may take a while for your body to adjust and produce less sweat. I took about 2 weeks.*

## Liquid Hand soap

- bar soap – approx 4oz
- 8 cups water
- essential oil (optional)

*Start boiling water and grate the bar of soap, then slowly add the soap flakes to the water until they are all incorporated. Add essential oils and stir to combine. Let the mixture sit and cool. If it is too runny, heat up and add more soap flakes, too gloopy? heat up and add more water.*

## Mouthwash

- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons echinacea tincture
- 3-4 drops myrrh essential oil
- 2 drops tea tree essential oil

*Put ingredients in a dark container and shake before each use.*

## Mirror Cleaner

- Jude's Magic cloth (or something similar)
- water

*Simply wet the cloth, wring it out, and wipe. There won't be any streaks! No bottles to refill.*



# BEDROOM SWAPS

We don't often think about our rooms and clothes as a culprit for producing plastic waste, but in recent years, clothing has become a major contributor to plastic pollution. New fabrics like polyester, nylon, faux leathers and furs are all **made of plastic** and break down slowly, releasing microplastics with each wash. But worse than that has come **the rise of Fast Fashion** in which styles of clothing change constantly and consumers purchase **cheap clothing** to kept up with trends, but then **throw them away after only a few uses** or the next trend has arrived.



So instead of buying something cheap, that you're only getting because it's popular now but doesn't quite fit and suit the style that you want in the long term, why not:

- **Buy second hand** (the most sustainable item is the one that already exists)
- **Save and splurge** on a beautiful pieces that you love and fit you well
- Keep it in good condition and pass it on when it no longer fits or suits you





# LAUNDRY ROOM SWAPS

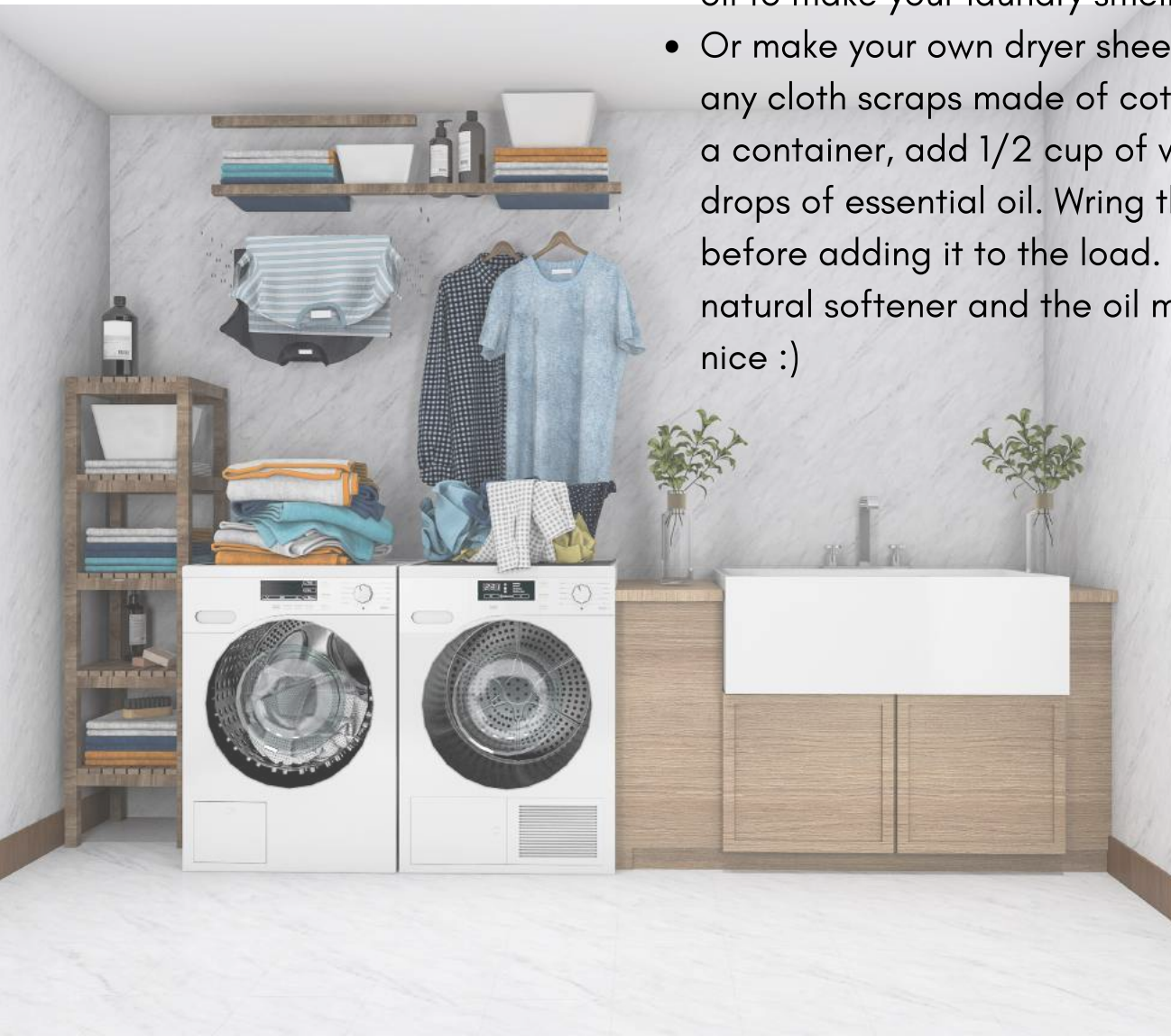
## Laundry soap

- If you love your liquid soap, grab a refill from Purple Carrot
- Detergent powder in cardboard is better choice
- If you're all in though, get yourself some **soap nuts** (pictured right). Toss a handful of these in with your wash and then compost them once they stop producing suds



## Dryer sheets

- These are one of the most carcinogenic things in our homes! and should be replaced with **wool balls** (add a few drops of essential oil to make your laundry smell nice)
- Or make your own dryer sheets by cutting up any cloth scraps made of cotton, put them in a container, add 1/2 cup of vinegar and 8 drops of essential oil. Wring the cloth a bit before adding it to the load. Vinegar acts as natural softener and the oil makes it smell nice :)



# GROCERIES

Avoiding plastic at grocery stores is really tricky since we can't really control the kind of packaging it comes in, but here are a few suggestions.

## Produce

Growing your own food or picking it from a local farm is the the most plastic free method, but when that is too tricky grab fruit and veggies from the **bulk produce section** while skipping the silly small plastic bags and instead using your own or just putting the veggies into your cart.

Buy from **farmers markets and farms** and let them know that you'd like your food plastic free, they may give you a option or at the least, it'll get them thinking about what their customers want.

## Breads, pasta, snacks

These rarely come wrapped in anything else but plastic so the biggest way to avoid them is to **make your own**. It takes time and is a bit challenging, but learning how to bake bread and make pasta is a great way to rediscover the flavors of food.

## Meats

Some grocery stores will allow you to **bring your own container** and collect meat from the clerk at the meat counter (make sure the container is very clean). Another option is to talk to your local butcher and discuss options of how you'd like to purchase your meat plastic free.





# OUT AND ABOUT

## Fast food

The smell drags you in as you drive by but the packaging is here to stay long after that burger has been eaten. So here are some options in order of most to least waste:

- Order the meal but **ask for no utensils, straws, or other plastic extras** (keep reusable stashed in your car)
- **Skip the drink** since they're often coated in plastic to keep liquid from seeping through and come with a lid and straw
- **Go to a better fast food joint** that uses recyclable or compostable packaging (5 Guys uses aluminium and paper bags)
- **Spurge** and sit down at a restaurant
- Skip the fast food and **cook at home** or pack food to go (duh...we all know this)

## Shopping!!!

Whether it's your retail therapy or a dreaded to-do that you keep procrastinating, shopping especially at the mall, means getting lots of bags for only a few products, odd trinkets, and sometimes samples that end up as waste. So here are the tips:

- **Bring your own bag**, pack everything in it, and tell the cashier that you don't want a bag before they start ringing you through.
- **Say no to samples, brochures**, and other things that you really don't want and know will end up in the trash (you've just saved the work of tossing or recycling it!)



# THIS AND THAT



## Online shopping

COVID made online shopping the safest way to buy what we need, but with all of that shopping came styrofoam, plastic bubble wrap and layers upon layers of impenetrable tape, none of which will decompose naturally for several hundred years....

So instead let's:

- **Buy locally** when possible
- Purchase from companies that use **compostable or recyclable packaging**
- And **combine packages** when possible as a last resort

## Presents!

I love birthdays and Christmas but it's always a shock to see how much wrapping paper is left and sad to throw it all in the garbage. **There is a plastic film on the paper that makes it shiny and pretty and unrecyclable :(**

But the Japanese have a gorgeous wrapping technique called Furoshiki, using cloth and ribbon that are both reused over and over as well as natural decorations like twigs, flowers, pine cones, etc to give it a little flair. Try it and delight the recipient!





# FURTHER RESOURCES



WASTE  
REDUCTION  
WEEK  
IN CANADA

My **PLASTIC** Free Life

BUYmeONCE



## DOCUMENTARIES

