

## **Community Forum: The problem with plastics**

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We see them everywhere; in grocery stores, retail outlets, or on the side of the road are the plastics that are polluting our environment.

Plastics take various forms; the single-use plastic bag, the plastic bottle, the plastic straw. All are subjects of targeted attempts at plastics reduction by many grassroots organizations across the country.

We are needlessly polluting our environment, filling our landfills and our oceans with something that does not fully biodegrade, when there are real and clear alternatives available.

When we send our plastic products out for recycling after consumption, to be broken down and then made into new product, too often that is not the end result. In 2014 alone, the United States consumed 33.6 million tons of plastic waste, recycling only 9.5 percent. Something needs to change.

We need to alter the notion, one so fundamentally ingrained in our everyday interactions, that having a highly disposable lifestyle is a positive because it's convenient.

In 2013 alone, the United States generated 258 million pounds of municipal solid waste, amounting to 4.4 pounds per person per day.

The best way to reduce our use of plastics is to change habits, for instance, cloth bags for our weekly grocery trip.

Reusing always sounds more difficult than it really turns out to be. When you alter your lifestyle to reuse rather than purchase and discard, there is very little time lost to adjusting. It is all about the small steps, and those do add up over time, from person to person.

Reusable water bottles are a great alternative to purchasing single-use plastic bottles while on the go, and they can last years without needing replacement. This not only saves you money in the long term, but actively reduces the volume of waste that individuals produce on a yearly basis.

Bringing reusable bags to the grocery store or with you while shopping eliminates the need for the single-use plastic bags, thus reducing the average American family's 1,500 yearly plastic bag consumption.

There are numerous alternatives to plastic straws out there; paper and pasta straws intended for single use, and reusable, washable metal and silicone ones.

In today's market, it is becoming easier to avoid the consumption of single-use plastics. All it takes is the decision by the consumer to do so. You may have to initially go out of your way to make a purchase, but that purchase will last years and not minutes; it can stay in your pantry and not end up in the garbage.

We want to preserve the earth for future generations, and among the small steps to do so would be to rely less on products that do not biodegrade and are produced by the refining of fossil fuels. Reduce and reuse, for the sake of the environment.

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