

Back-to-School 2023: 6 Tips for Parents to Save the Planet, Whilst Also Saving Money, This September

As the summer holidays draw to a close, it's time to start gearing up for back-to-school season. Traditionally, this time of year is spent shopping for a long list of new items for children heading back for the next school year, including pencil cases, lunch boxes and uniforms. But this year, we are all paying more attention to both the planet and our pockets, with the rising cost of living causing parents to be more vigilant of their back-to-school purchases.

However, being careful about what we buy for our kids this year will not only protect our planet, but also benefit our pockets. Many of the items we typically buy for our children are made of less durable and cheap plastic, designed to be thrown away and re-purchased each school year, but over time this equates to massive amounts of waste and cost. Plastic pollution has been named as one of the most pressing environmental issues facing our planet, so we should all be paying attention to the simple actions we can make to reduce plastic waste.

Experts at [The Breteau Foundation](#) who are heading up a new initiative called Plastic Changemakers, have shared their top tips on how parents can help save money and the planet this back-to-school season. Plastic Changemakers is a global initiative launching in mid- September, which aims to inspire over 1 million primary-aged children to take action against plastic pollution in their homes and communities. The initiative will provide educators around the world with a free-of-charge and comprehensive set of educational resources on the topic of plastic pollution, hoping to kickstart a global movement on responsible plastic use.

1. Swap, Don't Shop

Keeping up with growing kids is a struggle at the best of times, but replenishing pricey school uniforms at full price is becoming unrealistic for many families across the UK. Shockingly, 1.4 million wearable school uniform garments are thrown away every single year.

To fight this many schools and shops have set up school uniform swaps, where you can take old/too small uniforms and swap them for next year's uniform size. "Swap shops" are often free and can help save wearable uniforms from entering landfill – win, win! If your school

doesn't already have a "swap shop", why not start one between school friends or encourage the school to set one up.

Uniformly – a platform where parents & PTAs can buy, sell, give away & recycle outgrown school uniforms.

<https://uniformerly.co.uk/>

2. Think Inside the (Lunch) Box

It is estimated that more than 1.2 billion metres of single-use cling film is used by British households every year - enough to go around the circumference of the earth 30 times over! Not only does this type of single use plastic take hundreds of years to decompose and release toxic chemicals into our environment, but buying this each week to wrap our children's sandwiches in can really add up.

Instead, opt for beeswax wraps, a re-usable food wrap that does the same job as cling film for over a year. This means a one-time, low-cost purchase can see your kids through a whole year of packed lunches!

Tala Reusable Beeswax Food Wrap – Available at John Lewis - £6

<https://www.johnlewis.com/tala-reusable-beeswax-food-wrap/p6350267>

3. Say No to Unnecessary New Stationery

We all know that returning to school with the latest pencil case and stationery is seen as an essential for most children. We've all been inundated with requests for the latest bendy ruler or coloured erasers. However, sticking to the latest stationery trends can often leave us reaching for non-durable and cheap items made of plastic that need replacing often.

A simple work around is to try to pay attention to the quality and material of the products you are buying. Ask yourself "will this item last?" or "can I buy this item made from a more environmentally friendly material?". Buying more durable or environmentally friendly products will mean we are sending less harmful plastic products to landfill each year.

4. Drink Up!

Staying hydrated is incredibly important BUT single use plastic bottles are one of the biggest polluters for our planet. Humans collectively use approximately 1.2 million plastic bottles per minute, so switching to a reusable water bottle can save billions of plastic bottles going to landfill each year.

Getting a good quality reusable bottle for your little one is a great idea to avoid single-use plastic waste. Stainless steel models can help keep your child's water cooler for longer and many children's reusable bottles also come with some of their favourite TV characters or patterns on too, so both your child and the planet will be super happy with one of these.

Hello Hossy - £15

<https://hello-hossy.co.uk/collections/water-bottles>

5. Pumped up Kicks

We all know kids grow out of shoes like no tomorrow. So, with new shoes needed so often for your children, what happens to their old ones? Whilst shoes can be recycled, they typically aren't. The vast majority of children's shoes are made with unsustainable materials—including plastics, glues, and leathers—that don't break down easily, which means that many of those 300 million discarded shoes may take up to 1,000 years to decompose in landfills.

To help curb the amount of plastic your child consumes with each step of their new kicks, opt for shoes using recycled materials. There are now many fun, and recycled, shoes on the market for your children to choose from.

Clarks Hoop Run Kids Trainers - £26

<https://www.clarks.co.uk/c/Hoop-Run-Kid/p/26175229>

6. Backpacks that give back

Your child's backpack goes through a lot in a school year, usually ending up covered in ink, leaked food and dirt from good use. This makes it incredibly hard for parents to avoid purchasing new backpacks, as often cleaning the old one isn't even possible as it is so well used and has started deteriorating.

To help avoid plastic waste, whilst not adding to your backpack budget, try and look out for a sustainable backpack or a backpack made with recycled materials where possible. Consider Kidly's Backpack made from 100% recycled polyester, for £15.

Kidly- £12

https://www.kidly.co.uk/products/kidly/backpack/24552?colour=faces-print&utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=surfaces

The Plastic Changemakers initiative will launch on The Breteau Foundation website in mid-September when all educators will be able to download the education pack for free. Visit <<<https://www.breteaufoundation.org/plastic-changemakers/>>> for more information or to register to receive updates.