

Plastic Free July: Seven Simple, Low Effort Life Hacks That Will Reduce Your Single-Use Plastic Consumption

July each year marks “Plastic Free July”, a global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution.

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental issues facing our planet due to the rapid increase in production of single-use plastics. We have all become used to having single-use plastic in our daily lives, with the durable, cheap, and versatile nature of the material making plastic perfect for almost every food and drink carton across the world. But this has resulted in an overwhelming amount of plastic waste, which can take up to 500 years to decompose, and often ends up in our oceans, threatening wildlife.

So, what’s the **good news** I hear you say? The good news is that reducing your consumption of single-use plastic can be incredibly easy. If we all try some simple hacks to reduce our reliance on single-use plastic, we can together make a huge impact during Plastic Free July and beyond.

This year, global non-profit organisation The Breteau Foundation has set out on a mission to inspire over 1 million children to become ambassadors for change in the fight against plastic via its Plastic Changemakers initiative. As part of the initiative, environmental and educational experts have come together to provide a comprehensive education pack all about plastics, and how we can kickstart a global movement on tackling plastic pollution. Below, one of The Breteau Foundation’s plastic pollution experts, Dr Imogen Napper, has given her top tips on how to reduce plastic use.

1. T-Shirt to Tea Towel

You may not be aware that one of the major sources of plastic pollution is our clothes, with materials such as polyester, nylon and other synthetic fibres all being forms of plastic. So, when your favourite t-shirt has had its day, think twice about automatically throwing it in the bin, as there are many ways it can continue its life! Old clothes and materials make great cleaning rags and cloths. Simply tear them or cut them up. Not only does this reuse your clothes, it will also save you money on cleaning rags – win, win!

2. Get Loose!

When shopping for groceries, choose loose fruit & vegetables where possible, instead of pre-packaged ones in plastic bags. The more we all switch to doing this where possible, the more our supermarkets will get the idea that we don’t need plastic for our veg! If you still want to organise or protect your fruits and vegetables, consider using reusable produce bags instead.

3. Embrace Reusable Water Bottles

Reusable bottles are everywhere these days, with many companies springing up selling stylish, affordable and leak proof bottles. Whilst it may seem like a small swap, humans use approximately 1.2 million plastic bottles per minute in total ¹, so switching to a reusable water bottle can save billions of plastic bottles going to landfill each year. With many major cities, including London, investing in handy water refill points, using a reusable water bottle is as simple (and cheap) as ever.

4. Switch to Bamboo in the Bathroom

¹ <https://basq.livelarq.com/sustainability/how-many-plastic-water-bottles-are-used-a-minute/>

Plastic toothbrushes contribute to the growing plastic waste problem. Make a sustainable switch by opting for bamboo toothbrushes. Bamboo is a biodegradable and renewable resource, offering a planet-friendly alternative to traditional plastic toothbrushes.

5. BYO Bags

Avoid single-use shopping bags where possible and opt for reusable bags, which are sturdy and longer lasting. We aren't all perfect and won't always remember our reusable bags, so a great idea is to have a foldable bag in your regular handbag, your car or work bag, so that you always have one with you.

6. Start Your Affair with Tupperware

If you know you will have to eat lunch on the move, why not plan ahead and prepare your lunch at home in a Tupperware or reusable container. By doing so, you will not only save yourself a hefty Pret sandwich price tag, but you will avoid the plastic waste that comes with shop-bought sandwiches and lunch items.

7. Simplify the Matter with Two Questions

A great overall tip for reducing single-plastic use, is to ask yourself these two simple questions:

Will I use this plastic more than once?

If the answer is no, ask yourself if you really need this item or if there is another option where plastic won't be used.

If the answer is yes, is there a reusable option you can purchase?

Does this need to be made out of plastic?

Are there other material options for this product or packaging which are biodegradable, more easily recycled or will last longer? If so, seek these out.

About the Plastic Changemakers initiative

The Breteau Foundation aims to inspire and empower over 1 million primary school children around the world to take action against plastic pollution in their homes and communities. The Breteau Foundation's international experience in education has shown that children want to see more responsible plastic use in their homes and communities. The Breteau Foundation has partnered with the makers of the global hit TV series *Miraculous™: Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir* ZAG and Mediawan Kids & Family, on a special episode on plastics simply called "Action". Educational experts and environmental experts have co-produced the episode and have created a complete, easy to use, FREE set of resources for teachers, which are aligned to curricula. With the right knowledge, the Plastic Changemaker initiative will enable children to become ambassadors for change and kick start a global movement on responsible plastic use at home and in their community.

The "Action" episode and Plastic Changemaker Education Pack will be available to stream and download (respectively) in September 2023 via The Breteau Foundation website for free. Teachers can pre-register to receive the resources at: <https://www.breteaufoundation.org/fight-against-plastic/>.

About Dr Imogen Napper

Imogen is a Postdoctoral Researcher at The University of Plymouth and contributor in the Plastic Changemakers Education Pack. Her research investigates the sources of plastic pollution into the environment. In 2018, Imogen became a National Geographic Explorer and Sky Ocean Rescue Scholar.