

*Watch your
garbage
dwindle
with these
doable tips!*



Shrink Your Waste

Throwing less in your trash is easier than you think—and it benefits more than just the environment. People who reduce what they toss wind up saving cash and eating a healthier diet, too. Here's your room-by-room guide to a simpler, less wasteful life.

BY JULIA DENNISON

“Waste is a concept humans invented and, theoretically, could uninvent.” This is the mantra of Darby Hoover, a senior resource specialist at the National Resources

Defense Council and an expert on something she hates: trash. But uninventing garbage may be hard to imagine when even an Amazon order leaves you with plastic air bags to dispose of. Americans generate more garbage than any other country in the world: 4.4 pounds per person per day, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). That figure (nearly double what it was in 1960!) doesn't even include industrial or construction waste—just municipal solid waste (MSW), defined as the everyday items people toss to the curb. The result: a whopping 135 million tons of trash stacking up in landfills every year—enough to spread 30-stories high over almost 850 football fields.

Clearly, this is troubling for the environment. As solid waste decomposes, it emits methane, a greenhouse gas that traps unwanted heat in the Earth's atmosphere. Landfills are the third-largest source of methane emissions in the U.S., accounting for nearly 20 percent. Meanwhile, what the EPA calls “waste management”—which includes the army of trucks hauling trash to those landfills—is responsible for up to 5 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Then there's the

Pacific Ocean's trash vortex, a thousands-of-miles-long floating patch of garbage—formed by currents pulling together illegally dumped waste—that's polluting our waters and killing our marine life (see p. 77 for more). And these problems are poised to grow: If we continue on our current wasteful path, we could see a 70 percent global increase in MSW over the next 10 years, a World Bank study predicts.

Rethinking what we toss has led people like Erika Rathje, a web and graphic designer in Vancouver, B.C., to adopt a zero-waste lifestyle. By recycling, composting and reducing what she bought, Rathje was able to go an astounding 13 months without taking out her trash—and when she finally did, all she chucked out were a couple of unrecyclable broken glasses from Ikea, freshness packets from supplement bottles, floor sweepings and a paint-splattered plastic sheet from a visiting decorator. “Change your pattern once, and you can make it a habit,” Rathje says.

Rathje's commitment is ambitious, but even small changes help—the Earth *and* you. Bea Johnson, author of *Zero Waste Home*, has saved thousands of dollars over the years because she consumes less and buys in bulk (which she says knocks 15 percent off the price). “When you replace anything that's disposable with a reusable alternative, you accumulate the savings,” she adds. Ready to cut back? Follow this easy guide to slashing trash in every aspect of your life.

kitchen/dining room

EASY TWEAKS

➤ **Keep paper towels out of sight** Jen Boulden of blog JenB TV stashes her roll of non-bleached towels under the sink for major spills only.

➤ **Use the humans at the grocery store** Up to a third of household waste is made up of packaging, much of it from food. Belly up to the butcher and bakery counters to buy meat and bread wrapped in paper (keep loaves in a bread box at home for freshness). Don't forget a reusable tote like the Stash It (\$16, ourgreenhome.co), which folds up smaller than a wallet.

➤ **Buy dish brushes and sponges made of natural materials** Wood, boar bristle and nut-shell scrubbers are biodegradable and look better, too, Rathje says. She recommends Twist sponges (from \$2, twistclean.com).

➤ **Use loose-leaf tea** Skip the bags and get a reusable metal tea ball (starting at about \$3), which locks leaves into a mesh compartment for steeping. Bonus: Stock it with herbs to flavor your next soup.

GO-GREENER GOALS!

➤ **Choose cloth napkins** We've all seen it: partygoers wadding up one barely-used paper napkin after another until a zillion are gone.

Fabric garners more respect, Johnson says: "If we put out a stack of cloth napkins, our guests use maybe half." For families, Christine Lenches-Hinkel, founder of eco-consultancy firm Waste Less Living in Pasadena, Calif., suggests a labeling system so each person can reuse his napkin a few times before washing. Buy various colors and know that Mom gets red, Dad gets blue and so on.

➤ **Make a shopping kit** A reusable bag or two may not cut it to hold your big weekly stock-up. "When we go

grocery shopping, we bring cloth bags for dried goods, mesh bags for produce and a pillowcase for our breads," Johnson says. A glass jar at the cheese counter nixes even the need for paper to wrap your *queso*.

➤ **Take a no-takeout vow** Once paper or cardboard meets grease (hi, pizza box!), it can't be recycled. Neither can condiment packets or plastic utensils. Spend an hour each weekend making chili or a casserole, freeze it in glass containers and reheat for easy, inexpensive

weeknight dinners. (Plus, people who cook most of their meals take in fewer calories, less sugar and less fat than those who eat out, finds new research from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.) If you do delivery, search dinegreen.com for a takeout spot with a Green Restaurant certification, given to eateries serious about waste reduction.

➤ **Pack a better lunch** Opt for durable, long-lasting metal lunch boxes such as PlanetBox (from \$35, [\[.com\]\(http://.com\)\). Juice boxes are tough to recycle, since they're often made from several materials fused together. If your kids plead for juice, buy it in a recyclable jug or juice your own, then pack it in an aluminum water bottle. And ditch the resealable \(and unrecyclable!\) plastic sandwich bags, which are so light they often get wind-swept into lakes and rivers. Lenches-Hinkel recommends washable Wrap-n-Mat \(\\$9, \[wrapnmat.com\]\(http://wrapnmat.com\)\) bags instead.](http://planetbox</p></div><div data-bbox=)



living room/bedroom

EASY TWEAKS

👉 **Choose durable furniture and clothing** If you're redecorating or clothes shopping, pick pieces that won't wear out quickly, the EPA recommends—materials like wood, wool or leather trump flimsier synthetics.

👉 **Buy secondhand** If your "new" top is simply new to you, you're discouraging manufacturers from churning out endless items each season (a huge waste of resources). Wearing previously owned duds doesn't have to mean compromising your style; take advantage of the recent surge in vintage e-shops, such as Covetique and 1stdibs.com. Buying secondhand is extra-vital for pieces you won't need for long, like baby clothes.

👉 **When in doubt, donate** Don't be afraid to take even your shabbiest gear to Goodwill, says Seth Leitman of blog The Green Living Guy. If they can't sell your textiles, they will recycle them.

👉 **Stream your music and movies** Calling all the last holdouts who prefer DVDs and CDs to streaming: Make Planet Earth your reason to step into the 21st century! Whatever's on that disc from Target, you can most likely find now on iTunes, Netflix or HBO On Demand.

👉 **Think multipurpose when you shop** Slash how much you consume *and* save closet space by choosing clothing that bridges seasons. Rather than buying three jackets, for example, Johnson recommends the Patagonia Tres Down Parka: Wear it

sans liner as a trench, don the liner-only as a puffy jacket or put it all together as a warm, waterproof coat (\$529, patagonia.com).

👉 **Ask for experience gifts** A babysitter for a night or a parasailing flight make for the best type of present, Johnson says. A study last year in *Psychological Science* confirmed that experiences boost people's bliss more than material items do.

GO-GREENER GOALS!

👉 **Give cloth diapers a try** Kids go through 8,000 diapers before they're potty-trained, and each nappy takes approximately 550 years to break down in a landfill, according to the EPA. Boulden uses cloth diapers with cute designs during the day and unbleached

diapers from Seventh Generation at night (\$11, shop.seventhgeneration.com) for her 9-month-old baby, Sky. GroVia come in a range of patterns (from \$16, gro-via.com). Or try gDiapers, a cotton line with inserts that are compostable or flushable (\$18, gdiapers.com).

👉 **Skip that phone upgrade** Of the estimated 1.8 billion phones bought in 2014, nearly half will likely be shoved to the back of a drawer by the end of this year, finds a report in *Chemical & Engineering News*. (A measly 3 percent get recycled!) Trade yours in, donate it—the Verizon Wireless HopeLine Program gives refurbished cell phones to domestic violence survivors—or pass on the upgrade to begin with.

YOUR NEW NO-WASTE FORMULA

Bea Johnson adds two tenets to the "reduce, reuse, recycle" triumvirate: *refuse and rot*.

REFUSE Create a free login with TrustedID (catalogchoice.org) to stop receiving junk mail. Skip business cards and swap info on your phone instead. Decline bottled water.

REDUCE Consider whether a purchase is truly necessary. Plastic forks for a picnic? Go the extra step and bring the real—washable—silverware.

REUSE About to toss something? Ponder how it could be repurposed—like turning T-shirts into dust rags.

RECYCLE Call your recycling center; some accept a wider range of items via drop-off.

ROT Compost in your yard or take compostable waste (everything from produce and egg shells to lawn trimmings, hair and lint) to a farmers market or community garden.



WOOL RULES, SYNTHETICS DRÖÖL.

VINTAGE BLING: ALWAYS IN STYLE

bathroom

EASY TWEAKS

👉 **Ditch the wipes and cotton balls** It's dizzying to think about all the puffs, swabs and face wipes clogging landfills, especially when most can be replaced by something you already have: a washcloth. If the fabric is too rough on your skin, try a muslin cloth (two for \$8, lizearle.com). Either way, launder after every three uses, according to *Consumer Reports*.

👉 **Upgrade your shave** So you're not tossing a whole razor every time the blade gets dull, search Etsy for bamboo-handled safety razors that fit the interchangeable metal cartridges sold at drugstores. Extend any razor's life with a Blade Buddy sharpener (\$20, amazon.com). "It makes a typical shaver last months versus weeks," Leitman says.

👉 **Say no to plastic applicators** The average woman throws away between 250 and 300 pounds of pads and tampon applicators in her life, according to the book *Flow: The Cultural Story of Menstruation*. Opt for cardboard applicators over plastic, or, better yet, no applicator, such as Seventh Generation organic cotton applicator-less tampons (\$6, seventhgeneration.com). For pads, try chlorine- and dye-free versions (\$5, seventhgeneration.com). This summer, Jessica Alba's company, The Honest Co., will launch the world's first organic cotton tampon with a bioplastic applicator, plus a line of certified organic, hypoallergenic cotton pads.

👉 **Switch to economy-size shampoo bottles** To save on plastic and cash, "keep refilling a smaller bottle from a big bottle you keep under your sink," Boulden says.

👉 **Choose bar soap over liquid** Another chance to rid yourself of plastic: Buy soap



SHEA BUTTER: A SMOOTH OPERATOR ON HAIR

A WASHCLOTH IS ALL YOU NEED ON YOUR FACE.

BOAR BRISTLES BRUSH BEST.

THIS SOAP BEATS PUMP, BAR NONE.

BUY BEAUTY POTIONS IN BULK, POUR INTO A BOTTLE.

in paperboard packaging, Lenches-Hinkel says.

GO-GREENER GOALS!

👉 **Have a less wasteful period** Hear us out: Rathje recommends reusable silicone menstruation cups such as the DivaCup (\$30, divacup.com). It works like a tampon except it collects blood (to rinse out later) instead of absorbing it. Major benefits include no leakage (it forms a seal inside you, kind of like a diaphragm), zero risk of toxic shock syndrome (you can wear one for up to 12 hours without

changing it) and because of the seal, no odors. You can also try washable Lunapads (\$12, lunapads.com).

👉 **Grab a hanky** Nix Kleenex and go retro with a handkerchief; just use and chuck in the laundry. "They can make a statement if you get a funky pattern, and they save you money," Rathje says.

👉 **Make your beauty products multitask** Johnson uses bar soap to wash her bod, shampoo and shave—also a smart, TSA-friendly space-saver when traveling. She also swears by pure cocoa

powder (from the kitchen) as a bronzer. "I buy it in a cloth bag and fill a jar at home," she says. Shea butter moisturizer doubles as a hair smoother, Rathje adds. Try Sunfood (\$30, amazon.com), which comes in a glass jar.

👉 **Brush better** Opt for a wood- or bamboo-handled toothbrush with biodegradable bristles, such as the shaved boar bristles on Fuchs Pure Natural Bristle (\$21 for five, amazon.com). Plus, try pure silk (read: compostable) Radius floss (from \$3, Whole Foods stores), Rathje advises.

laundry room/broom closet

EASY TWEAKS

👉 **Buy concentrated cleaners** If you tend to purchase cleaning products instead of making your own, choose those in concentrated form, so you use less at a time. One *Natural Health* editor has been working her way through a single bottle of Shaklee Basic H2 Organic Super Cleaning Concentrate (\$12, shaklee.com) for six years!

👉 **Nix dryer sheets** “Dryer sheets were designed to stop static in unnatural materials—so as you switch to natural fabrics, you won’t need them,” Rathje says. For synthetics you own, adding half a cup of white vinegar to the rinse cycle (don’t worry, no smell) reduces static, she adds. Or, try a dryer ball, a reusable orb that bounces between your clothes as they dry, lifting and separating them and thus reducing static and wrinkles by allowing more hot air to circulate. “It cuts the drying time so you save energy, too,” Leitman says. Shep’s Wool Dryer Balls (\$20 for four, wooldryerballs.com) are ideal since they’re made from a renewable resource, or try the spiked rubber Dryer Max Dryer Ball (\$10, amazon.com).

GO-GREENER GOALS!

👉 **Make your own cleaner** Pantry items like white vinegar (a natural disinfectant), lemon juice, borax, baking soda and mild liquid soap, like castile, are good alternatives to packaged cleaning products. “We keep a bottle of vinegar mixed 50-50 with water in a reusable spray bottle under every sink,” Boulden says. “When a countertop is grimy, spray, scrub with a washcloth and throw the rag in the hamper.” If you’re not fond of the vinegar smell (which disappears in seconds), add

a few drops of essential oil. And you don’t need different products to scrub every nook and cranny, she says. “I’m convinced next they’ll be marketing a product that’s meant to clean only your toilet handle!”

👉 **Pick old-school cleaning tools** We know: Your Swiffer is hard to part with. But durable, reusable scrubbers like mops, rags and sponges beat disposables, the EPA advises. Rathje uses wood-handled brooms and wooden dustpans that “are so beautiful, I have them hanging on a wall,” she says. The Brook Farm General Store (brookfarmgeneralstore.com) carries a range of pretty options made from materials like beech wood and horsehair. Talk about a clean sweep! ♦

THE PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC

Somewhere between the coasts of California and Japan, there’s an environmental nightmare floating in the ocean: the Great Pacific Gyre, also known as the garbage patch or the Pacific trash vortex, a mass of debris that’s twice the size of Texas and comprised predominantly of plastic bottles.

Shockingly, only around a quarter of 1 percent of the more than 7 billion pounds of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic that’s discarded each year in the U.S. ends up being recycled. The rest, along with 90 percent of the world’s PET plastic bottles (like the kind used for water or soda), makes its way to places like the garbage patch, typically via illegal dumping. Even when you pop plastic in a recycling bin, it can end up in a trash vortex (there are four others in the world’s oceans), since overfilled U.S. recycling plants sometimes ship waste to countries where we have little control over it.

Plastic’s future may be brighter, since more companies are starting to play with a biodegradable version called bioplastic, made from materials like corn. Some bioplastics are even compostable (check for the recycling logo with the number 7). But until manufacturers figure out how to make this new plastic sturdier, it likely won’t become the norm. In the meantime, it’s best to stick to glass, cardboard or metal.

