

Here are some fun ways to REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR, & RETHINK!

GO SHOPPING WITH REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

Plastic bags are incredibly toxic to our planet. Many recycling facilities do not recycle bags and the bags in fact damage their machinery. Plastic bags take an estimated 500-1,000 years to decompose in landfills. Furthermore, they are very dangerous to wildlife as they sweep across our majestic landscapes. For a funny, sad, and informative video on the subject, look up “The Majestic Plastic Bag - A Mockumentary”, a 4-minute video that will be well worth your time. Learn about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a place in the ocean twice the size of Texas where millions of plastic items swirl around in the currents endlessly. Quite simply, reusable bags produce no waste! Whoever came up with the idea in the first place that we needed disposable bags to go shopping?



BUY IN BULK; AVOID ITEMS WITH EXCESSIVE PACKAGING

Many food items and products we buy come wrapped in excessive packaging that have no further purpose to us. Avoid buying items like this, or buy in bulk. Buy food products in larger containers and fill smaller containers with it as needed, and you won't need to go to the store as often to buy more – and you will have less packaging waste.

COMPOST

Composting your food scraps might not be as messy or smelly as you might think, and aside from greatly reducing your waste, it enriches the soil!

WRAP GIFTS IN NEWSPAPER

...or with other leftover paper materials you might have. Get creative! A handmade gift-wrap makes any gift more interesting, and is much better than purchasing additional gift wrap materials.

MAKE YOUR OWN CARDS

Even though Hallmark might say something more eloquently than we can, receiving a store-bought card never really seems that personal, and how often do those cards end up in the recycling bin after a week or two? Instead, you can make a card by cutting out pictures from a magazine or simply decorating a card made from used envelopes or cereal boxes, and you can write a personal message that might even prompt the recipient to hold onto your card as a keepsake.

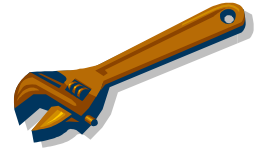
DON'T THROW THINGS OUT; DONATE ANYTHING IN USABLE CONDITION

Many places are now collecting all kinds of fabrics to recycle into new textiles, and many things you no longer find useful could in fact be really helpful for others. Before throwing out a shirt because it has a bad stain in it, find a good place to donate it. Many towns hold collection drives for electronics, so don't just leave your unwanted TV set or computer out in the rain waiting for trash collection. You can donate books, old pans, clothing, appliances – almost anything you can think of. Remember, the landfill should be a last resort!

USE A REUSABLE COFFEE THERMOS AND WATER BOTTLE

I have already mentioned the great cost of plastic bags – the same is true of plastic water bottles. It takes a lot of energy and resources to create water bottles in the first place, and in many studies, bottled water

has proven to be taken directly from the tap. Furthermore, studies show chemicals in the plastic seep into the water, especially when sitting in the sun, and may be linked to some types of cancer. Reusable bottles are a great solution! Many cafes will even fill up your reusable bottle with your coffee, rather than giving you a disposable cup. For a compelling video on the subject, look up “The Story of Bottled Water”, an 8-minute video by Annie Leonard, where she discusses the whole life cycle of water bottles and their effect on the environment.



REPAIR DAMAGED ITEMS; RESIST BUYING THE NEWEST EDITION OF A PRODUCT

Some items that are minorly damaged can be repaired by none other than – you! It is much more worthwhile to spend ten minutes with a screwdriver than replace something with a new product. Also, even though our society is so consumed with the newest iPhone, cell phones actually are a great cost to the environment. Even though we can send them away to be recycled somehow, they often end up in third world countries where workers are exposed to harmful toxins in our cell phones as they dismantle them. It might end up being more fulfilling to hold on to an old phone rather than trading it in as soon as your upgrade is available. Furthermore, as consumers, we must understand that many products are created with planned obsolescence. This means that they are built to stop working after a certain amount of time. Companies don’t want our iPods to keep working for five years – they want us to keep buying more! Don’t get caught in the cycle. Buy wisely.

BUY USED

Thrift stores are not only a frugal way to shop, they are incredibly important for environmental reasons. You can find countless things in great condition at thrift stores or online. If you are buying books online, you should always look for used copies. They are often in near perfect condition.

GET CRAFTY!

There are all kinds of awesome art projects you can do with plastic bags, magazines, aluminum cans, soda bottles, tires, food wrappers, etc. Search online for “recycled art” and you will find countless amazing project ideas you never thought were possible. Ideas include making windchimes out of bottles, buttons, bottlecaps, and old pens, or rolling strips of magazine paper into beads and stringing them on a necklace, or weaving strips of paper together to make a bag, or a wallet! The possibilities are endless. When children do crafts, using construction paper and other items from the store can be very wasteful. Instead, use your waste to make art!

DO NOT BUY THINGS THAT CANNOT BE RECYCLED

Become a conscious consumer. Look to make sure the packaging on an item has a recycle symbol on it, so you know you can recycle it once you get home. If it can’t be recycled, organize a letter-writing campaign with friends to ask that company to change their packaging practices. Companies take consumers’ concerns seriously. Take note of the products you use often. Have you noticed that none of the Keurig coffee and tea containers can be recycled? Those are one-time use products that many people use daily – and they generate endless amounts of waste! Choose to support companies that are socially and environmentally responsible.

FIGHT JUNK MAIL

Junk mail accounts for a lot of deforestation and waste in our country. Sign up on Do-Not-Mail lists, and call magazine companies individually when you receive junk mail from them. A few catalogues a week may not seem like a lot, but they add up!

FIND ALTERNATIVES TO PAPER TOWELS AND TISSUES

We may find certain items to be necessities in our households, but if we challenge our habits, we might find other possibilities that are not as drastic as they at first might seem. Paper towels are incredibly wasteful. Use cloth towels and cloth napkins instead. You need to wash them, but it's hardly inconvenient to throw them in with your regular wash. You can also replace your personal tissue box with a handkerchief. Our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents used them, and they work perfectly well.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Some restaurants will allow you to bring your own Tupperware for them to use when you order take-out, rather than using their usual containers, which often get thrown out as soon as the meal is done. Many cafes will also fill up your coffee thermos rather than giving you a to-go cup. Make sure your child uses a reusable lunchbox, rather than paper bags every day, and consider using reusable diapers for your baby. Many towns are attempting to become zero-waste towns, but this effort should begin in each and every home. If you usually have two bags of garbage every week, try to bring it down to one, and perhaps even smaller and smaller! Remember, just because the garbage truck comes and waste disappears from sight, it's time for us to take responsibility we can to be as kind to the earth as she is to us.

