

Plastic Waste

Why it matters

Affordable, durable and flexible, plastic is part of all our lives, appearing in everything from packaging to clothes to beauty products. Plastic has a long life but is thrown away on a massive scale: every year around the world, more than 280 million tonnes of short-lived plastic products become waste, filling the oceans and, often, working their way into the human food chain.

Overall, 46% of plastic waste is landfilled, while 22% is mismanaged and becomes litter. Unlike other materials, plastic does not biodegrade. This pollution chokes marine wildlife, damages soil and poisons groundwater, and can cause serious health impacts.

But pollution is not the only problem with plastic. It also contributes to the climate crisis. The production of plastic is one of the most energy-intensive manufacturing processes in the world. The material is made from fossil fuels such as crude oil, which are transformed via heat and other additives into a polymer. In 2019, plastics generated 1.8 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions – 3.4 % of the global total.

Read more about plastics here: [Everything you need to know about plastic pollution](#)

Living Sustainably

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and the choices we make every day play a crucial role in reducing our impact on the planet.

By consuming and wasting less, we can all embrace a more sustainable lifestyle.



SWA has teamed up with **Miriam Adcock at Zero Waste Scotland**, who has shared her top tips for making small changes that can make a big difference.

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What about biodegradable plastics?

There has been a lot of effort in recent years to design plastics that take less time to degrade and decompose, and therefore have less impact on the environment. The problem, however, is that industrial processes are often needed for the material to decompose, they are difficult to recycle and difficult to isolate from other plastics when they enter the recycling waste streams, for example via your Council recycling. This means that they are often picked out and end up in landfill.*

*Source: Kubowicz and Booth, 2017, Biodegradability of Plastics: Challenges and Misconceptions.

What can I do?

- Avoid single-use plastic products whenever possible. If plastic products are unavoidable, reuse or repurpose them until they can no longer be used – and then recycle them.

Top tip from Miriam at Zero Waste Scotland: Carry out a Plastic Audit at home.

- Carrying out a plastic audit at home is a great way to get a handle on the plastic packaging you use, and what changes you could make.

What are the plastic packaging items you use in your home? Put all plastics you are disposing of for one week, such as milk bottles, fruit and veg packaging, clingfilm, bathroom items packaging, orange netting, scourers (yes, these contain a lot of plastic!) in one bag. Include any 'biodegradable' packaging such as disposable cups.

At the end of the week, analyse all the plastics you have collected in the bag. Sort them into reusable, recyclable at curbside, at the recycling centre, and recyclable at the supermarket.

Come up with your action plan: While some of your plastic use is likely unavoidable, are there things you could do differently to avoid using any of these plastic products?



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Things that can be avoided

- **Buy loose fruit and veg** to avoid any unnecessary packaging. Buy a produce bag the first time, or bring your own bag.
- **Compostable cups:** These are only compostable if you have the correct facilities. The majority of them will not decompose on your home composting heap but will need to go off to industrial home composting facilities. Not all local authority food waste collections accept them, you will need to check with your Council if they do, and even when this is the case, often they end up being removed from the material going for composting at the waste management centre, for fear that they will contaminate the other material going for composting. Compostable materials should also not go in the plastics recycling bin, as they are not plastic, and will contaminate your bin. Avoid them if at all possible – take your own reusable cup when you can.
- **Alternative to cling film:** Plastic tubs are great for this. They last for years, if not a lifetime. You could also reuse food packaging such as yoghurt cups.
- **Washing-up scourers:** Look for plastic free alternatives. There are many options, such as loofah or coconut fibre washing-up pads.
- **Deodorants:** There are quite a few refill options now, including at major pharmacies, or **make your own**
- **Shampoo:** You can buy shampoo and other hair products in bars now. Or, if you are loathed to give up your favourite brand, buy bigger packs – this will reduce the packaging used.

- **Period products:** On average, every woman will dispose of 11,000 period products in her lifetime. Millions of packs of tampons and sanitary towels are bought each year in Scotland. It's estimated that one pack of pads contains as much plastic as four carrier bags and takes 500 years to break down. See www.trialperiod.scot for information on ecofriendly options such as menstrual cups, reusable pads, and period pants.

Things that could be reused

- **Packaging, such as bubble wrap** – people love it!
- **Food containers**

Things that can be recycled

- **In local authority collections:** If you are not sure if you can recycle something in your collection, message your Council and ask.
- **Recycling at the supermarket:** Packaging such as plastic bags and wrappers, for example from fruit and veg, can be recycled at bigger supermarkets. Just take them with you next time you shop.
- **Terracycle:** This company handles a lot of hard to recycle items, for example a lot of schools have Terracycle recycling points for crisps. Many Boots stores now have Terracycle collection points, for example for contact lenses. Find out more at www.terracycle.co.uk

For more information and support, contact us at info@scottishwholesale.co.uk