

Recycling – Ways to Stop Using Single Use Plastics

As a follow up to last months article, this article concentrates on small things each of us can do to reduce the amount of single use plastics that are strewn about our environment. These ideas are not my original thoughts, but rather come from a multitude of sources.

First, think about plastic shopping bags. Do you ever drive down the street and see plastic shopping bags caught on bushes, trees limbs, chain link fences, or other bag catching protrusions. You can cut down on plastic bag usage by keeping reusable bags in your vehicles and using them when you go shopping. COVID-19 curtailed the use of reusable bags over the last couple of years, but shoppers are once again using them. If you do not like reusable bags, you can always ask for your purchased goods to be put in paper bags at grocery stores.

Plastic water bottles, just like plastic grocery bags, are the most plentiful items I find discarded in the environment when I do my clean up events. Rather than purchasing a crate of plastic water bottles, I use a refillable thermos bottle which keeps my water cold when I need a drink while working or playing outdoors in the heat of summer. When I visited the Detroit Zoo a few months ago, I was happy to see that they have water filling stations at a number of different locations on their grounds. And if you dislike the taste of your tap water, purchase a water filter pitcher (i.e. Brita or others) to get great tasting filtered water to fill your refillable bottle at home.

Restaurant styrofoam food containers are one of the worst things I find. With time, the containers break into smaller pieces, pollute the environment, and never go away. When at a restaurant, I take reusable food storage containers in with me which I keep in my vehicle. As an older person, I normally can only eat about half of what I am served at a restaurant. Rather than use their styrofoam containers for my leftovers, I put them in my reusable food containers. It is note worthy to know that some restaurants are also trying to be more environmentally conscious.

My wife had leftovers from her meal at a National Coney Island and they provided us with a compostable, cardboard container to put her leftovers in. Thank you National Coney Island!

Styrofoam coffee cups and plastic stirrers seem to be part of every work place I have been in. Using your own ceramic coffee mug and switching to wooden stirrers is definitely a better way to go. When I visit my financial planner's office, I am happy to see that when they offer Michele and I a cup of coffee, they do so with a variety of coffee mugs they keep in their coffee room. The coffee mugs are washed at the end of our visit and put back on the shelf for their next clients.

Plastic straws are another item always offered at restaurants when you either ask for a glass of water or a glass of soda. Here too, there are options. A few people use their own metal straw, but I prefer to keep paper straws in my vehicle which I take in with me upon entering the restaurant.

Are you someone like myself that enjoys a cup of coffee at home? For a awhile, Michele and I used quite a few K-cups until we realized how many were being discarded after use. A great way to move away from K-cups is to make use of a reusable single serve coffee pod that you place your favorite coffee grounds in. When we both want a couple of cups of coffee, we then brew a pot with a paper filter and coffee grounds.

Plastic plates and plastic cutlery are also a source of environmental pollution. These items are normally standards for events such as picnics. A better choice is paper plates and reusable cutlery. Michele and I bought a second set of cutlery for this purpose. After everyone is done eating, we supply a container to have everyone drop their cutlery in. Once home, we load the cutlery into our dishwasher, wash it, and then store it away for the next event.

Plastic sandwich bags, ziploc storage bags, and plastic freezer bags are other items that have easy replacement options. Reusable food storage containers (glass containers with plastic tops) provide a food repository,

can more often than not be used to reheat food in a microwave oven, and also are easily stacked in a freezer for those foods you want to store for use sometime in the future.

In summary, I have provided a number of suggestions to steer clear of single use plastics. I also know that most of these ideas require a little more effort on the part of each of you. However, if we do not start doing some of these little things, I am afraid of what this earth will look like for the next generation to come!

I know there are other things that can also be done. I would love to hear from anyone reading this article on whether they do any of the things I have covered above or have additional ideas on how to avoid single use plastics. Please email me at gpetrosky06@gmail.com with any thoughts or feedback you may have.

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Date: October, 2022