**Small First Steps to Going Zero Waste**

**Using Re.Use.Full to reduce the amount of trash you generate.**

By Madison Durham

In 2008, municipal solid waste made up [58.3 percent](https://dnr.mo.gov/env/swmp/docs/wcs2008.pdf) of all waste in Missouri. That means that almost a decade ago, well over half of the waste in our state came directly from our day-to-day lives. It is shocking to think of how much of an impact just going about our lives has on our environment, since all of that trash goes to a landfill and then pollutes our atmosphere. This is why reducing our waste production, even in small ways, is so important to the health of our planet and ourselves. Going zero waste can be daunting though, because it is certainly a long process. It is important to start slow, and in this post I am going to share with you some of the small things we can all start doing now to reduce the amount of trash we produce.

**How to Declutter**

One of the first steps to living with less waste is to eliminate plastic and other non biodegradable materials from your life. A great initial step to take is switching out your plastic tupperware for glass or stainless steel leftover containers. But don’t throw away your old containers, as long as they aren’t microwave spaghetti-stained!

First check here on Re.Use.Full for an organization that could use tupperware. The [truth](https://www.npr.org/2011/03/02/134196209/study-most-plastics-leach-hormone-like-chemicals) is that many plastics, even BPA free ones, leech harmful chemicals into food when used to keep leftovers. Plastic tupperware can be used to hold and organize other things though, like craft supplies or handy household items like nails or batteries. If there is no way to repurpose your plastic tupperware or no organization that wants to take it, recycling is always an option!

Almost everything plastic in your home has a biodegradable, infinitely reusable, or sustainable alternative. Slowly phase your plastic items out, donating or recycling them when possible (not everything can be donated or recycled--Please, just throw away your old, plastic toothbrush). Remember that many personal hygiene products are being made from bamboo now, so search for bamboo alternatives when preparing to replace something plastic.

**Grocery Shopping**

First, you will need to invest in a few things:

* Reusable bags for both produce and carrying your purchases home.
* Glass jars
* A wax pen

It is important when shopping in bulk that you record the tare weight of each of your jars before you fill them. This prevents you from over paying. Also make sure to write the PLU codes for your chosen bulk items because that will make checking out *much* easier.

Of course, not everything can be bought in bulk, or it may not make sense for you personally to buy it that way, and that is okay! Here are some tips for how to avoid as much waste as possible on all other grocery store purchases:

* Whenever possible, buy things in glass containers. These can almost always be recycled or repurposed.
* According to the [EPA](https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home), paper and cardboard packaging are compostable!
* If avoiding plastic is impossible, try to buy only recyclable plastics. Eartheasy has an incredibly thorough guide to plastics and recycling them [here](https://learn.eartheasy.com/articles/plastics-by-the-numbers/).
* Sometimes Sam’s Club and Costco are more convenient bulk options. It is always better to buy things that will not expire in bulk, even if they come in non-recyclable packaging. [Kathryn of Going Zero Waste](https://www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/2015/12/31/life-without-bulk) explains it well: “We bought a 25lb bag of rice when we first moved to California that lasted two years. That alone saved 25 plastic wrapped rice bags!”

**Clothes Shopping**

Going zero waste includes a change in our fashion habits. In recent years we have seen the rise of “fast fashion”, which is frequently produced unethically and [NPR reports](https://www.npr.org/2016/04/08/473513620/what-happens-when-fashion-becomes-fast-disposable-and-cheap) that we are more likely to dispose of cheap clothing rather than more expensive garments. So, not only is fast fashion harmful to the environment during production, but it can also end up in landfills.

So, when you *are* inevitably done wearing your cheap clothes, what is a good way to get rid of them? Well, Re.Use.Full is one! The nonprofit searching system allows potential donors to designate whether their clothing is still wearable or if it needs to be used in other ways, like as insulation in sustainable homes or recycled into new clothes and other textiles. Re.Use.Full’s option to donate even well-worn clothing means that there are very few reasons why clothes should end up in a landfill.

Another good way to get your old clothes out of your house and into the hands of someone who needs them is reselling your clothes. Check out consignment shops in your area or try out clothes selling apps like Depop and Poshmark. Sometimes it is necessary to make a bit of money back on those garments and that is okay. Try shipping your clothes to their new wearers in biodegradable packaging!

Now that you have donated all your fast fashion pieces, what are you going to wear and where should you be buying clothes? Make an effort to shop exclusively secondhand! Peruse your local thrift stores or consignment shops. These places are frequently full of unique and sturdy vintage pieces that will last. These days, shopping secondhand online is even an option. Etsy has hundreds of thrift and vintage shops, and people use Poshmark, Ebay, and Depop to rid themselves of their old clothes at reasonable prices. If you’re stuck, Lauren of Trash is For Tossers has a great [guide](http://trashisfortossers.com/zero-waste-wardrobe-secondhand-shopping/) to secondhand shopping.

**In Conclusion**

Going zero waste does not happen all at once. Starting slowly and working your way up will be far more effective and sustainable for you. It is important to remember that even a small effort now can help in a big way down the line. Using less plastic and buying second hand are two great ways to start the zero waste journey.