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Secrets of a
Relaxing Home

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There's a lot of garbage out there. The United States sent 137.7 million tons of trash to landfills in 2011, according to the Environmental Protection Agency—and a recent report found we're on track to run out of space to landfill within the next two decades. China is importing tons of the recyclable plastics we've been sending there. And for too many here, it's not easy to landfill or recycling plants in the first place. Think of all the litter along our roads and the sad stories about wet turtles with stream to their nostrils and whales with bags in their bellies.

In some ways, this problem is bigger than any one person. To make a real dent, we'll need our legislators to support more plastic bans, regulate wasteful industries—and be more aggressive about protecting the planet beyond the waste problem. Still, our actions do make a difference. The more consumers and voters start caring about waste reduction in their day-to-day lives, experts say, the more businesses and governments will make it a priority.

"The best thing we can do, environmentalists speaking, is not produce waste in the first place," says Jereed Jankelick, PhD, professor of environmental engineering at the University of Georgia and a National Geographic fellow specializing in solid waste. "I've been totally convinced by my research that, taken collectively, small choices make a difference. These choices, even if we aren't perfect, add up to significant positive impacts over time."

You'll see the impact in your life too: less clutter, money saved, new peace of mind. You don't have to take every step experts suggest here—we all work for you. You just might find life is better with less garbage in it.



HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

These zero-waste pros have ditched the trash can almost entirely. Pick and choose from their tips to shrink your own waste (as well as one you go to).

BY CATHERINE KIRK CROWLEY

Use what you already have.

"I don't encourage anyone to go out and buy things. I'm a pretty much zero-waste family in terms of what I'm buying," says Taryn Dyer, founder of the zero-waste website *The Good Cat*. "We practice buying less, reusing it if we can, plastic-free is good when possible (but it is a bag or a can). Recyclable things would be bags and most paper products are a lot more reusable and energy than most. Recycling the disposable version is not the cleanest thing there."

Reduce first.

People are consistently trying to get you single-use stuff, a flour on the street, a sample in the store, a bag of stickers and toilet paper at a birthday party. "No matter how much you refuse, reuse, and recycle, you're still the target of more stuff," says Lisa Johnson, author of *Zero Waste Home*, who uses her family of four another only a pint of garbage per year. "So be on the spot to say it from the beginning and just problem-solve that first."

Reimage the trash.

Working for another month, all members of the group, like the group, have members to the house to consider whether items could be repurposed or recycled instead. "You're reimagining the way you're thinking, moving out of the habit of having everything in the trash. We talked the amount of garbage we produced" says Larkin, who shares her waste-free life through a website called *Zero Waste*.

Pack reusable necessities.

From about the single-use items you pick up most in the outside world (coffee cups? straws? to-go bowls? gloves?) and stack a reusable version in your bag or car so you always have it with you. "We even carry a granola bar in our car for bear emergencies!" says environmental Sarah Schenk, an art and design student in Traverse City, Michigan. When you leave home, remember to wash your reusable and put them back so they're ready to go the next day.

Research before buying.

The Internet is a gold mine for zero-waste products, but you need to know what you're buying. "Buying things like cars and kitchen appliances when you first start out is so overwhelming I will use a free class over *The ZeroWaste* site," says a woman with a long list of zero-waste products. "It's important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying." says a woman with a long list of zero-waste products. "It's important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying."

Do a trash audit.

It might sound like the pain through your garbage can is the best way to learn about your waste habits. But you can make a more informed decision about what you're buying and what you're not buying. "Pick the things that don't get used in the garbage and find a way to use them," says the author of *Zero Waste Home*, who says her family's waste-free living is a lot more fun than she thought it would be.

Don't feel like you have to make everything yourself.

It is important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying. "I'm not making a Whole Foods or a local" says Lisa Johnson, who says she has her own business making zero-waste products. "It's important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying."

Look in a TerraCycle bin.

The company TerraCycle accepts many items that can't otherwise be recycled locally, like coffee capsules, yogurt containers, and pet food bags. In partnership with brands—including *Whole Foods Market*, *Wells*, *Sevens*, *Harvest Kids*, and *Just Juice*—it offers free recycling of their products. Or you can buy a TerraCycle bin for a specific need. It's a great way to recycle your old and used stuff that's a detriment to your wallet, says Dyer. "The next time you recycle, remember me to think before I purchase."

Green your garage.

If you're up for it, consider whether switching to a more eco-friendly car is worth the cost. It typically costs a year, replacing the 2011 car for a new one. It also keeps packaging, applications, and sometimes agricultural literature out of the trash. (Or consider getting underwear like the ones from *Patagonia* or *Blue Marlin*—they may not eliminate your need for laundry detergent, but you'll not look in a big way.)

Reduce, reuse, recycle.

"Pick up after the last place you did it and make sure you're doing it," says Johnson. "It's important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying." says a woman with a long list of zero-waste products. "It's important to know what you're buying and what you're not buying."