



GREEN STEPS ALLIANCE

A FREE GUIDE FROM GREEN STEPS ALLIANCE

# Your Everyday Guide to Reducing Plastic Waste

Simple, practical swaps you can start today — no perfection required, just progress.

## Why This Guide?

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Plastic pollution can feel like an overwhelming problem to take on as one person. The good news: you don't have to overhaul your entire life overnight. Small, consistent swaps — repeated by enough people — add up to real, measurable impact.

This guide collects some of the easiest, most affordable ways to cut down on single-use plastic at home, in the kitchen, and on the go. Pick one or two to start with this week. Once they feel natural, add another.

You don't need special equipment, a big budget, or a lifestyle overhaul. Most of the swaps in this guide cost the same as (or less than) what you're already buying — they just last longer and create less waste.

*Green Steps Alliance is a Colorado Springs-based non-profit dedicated to educating communities on sustainable living and reducing plastic pollution through workshops, community initiatives, and resources like this one.*

## Our Story

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Green Steps Alliance grew out of a simple observation: most people already care about the environment, but many don't know where to start, or feel like their individual choices won't add up to much. We started hosting small, informal workshops to change that — teaching practical, low-cost ways to cut down on plastic waste, and connecting neighbors who wanted to do more together.

Since then, we've grown into a community of people who show up for clean-ups, share tips with each other, and hold one another accountable in a friendly, no-judgment way. We don't expect anyone to be perfect. We've found that the households and communities that make the most progress are the ones that treat this as an ongoing habit, not a one-time project.

That's really the philosophy behind everything we do, including this guide: start small, stay consistent, and lean on your community when motivation runs low. Plastic pollution took decades to build up to where it is today, and undoing that damage will take sustained effort from a lot of people — but every single swap genuinely counts, and it adds up faster than most people expect once a few habits become second nature.

## Did You Know?

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A few things worth keeping in mind as you get started:

- A lot of single-use plastic — bags, straws, cutlery, wrappers — is only in use for a few minutes before it's thrown away, but it can stick around in the environment for a very long time afterward.
- Plastic doesn't fully disappear when it breaks down. Instead, it breaks into smaller and smaller pieces known as microplastics, which are much harder to clean up.
- A large share of the plastic produced worldwide is never recycled — it ends up in landfills, waterways, or the ocean instead.
- Reusable alternatives (bags, bottles, containers) typically pay for themselves after just a handful of uses compared to constantly buying single-use versions.
- Small household changes add up fast when repeated across a community — this is the whole idea behind Green Steps Alliance's workshops.

*None of this is about guilt — it's about awareness. The goal of this guide is simply to make the next right choice a little easier.*

It's worth saying plainly: no single household can solve plastic pollution alone, and no one expects you to. What actually moves the needle is a lot of ordinary people making small, repeatable changes at the same time — at home, at work, and in their neighborhoods. That's the gap this guide, and Green Steps Alliance more broadly, is trying to help close. Think of the tips ahead less as rules to follow perfectly and more as a menu to pick from, at whatever pace fits your life right now.

## Quick Wins: Easy Swaps to Start Today

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These five swaps have the biggest impact for the least effort — start here.

|                                  |                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reusable shopping bags</b>    | Keep a few in your car or by the door so you never forget them at the store.     |
| <b>A refillable water bottle</b> | Cuts down on single-use bottles and usually pays for itself within a month.      |
| <b>A reusable coffee cup</b>     | Many coffee shops offer a small discount for bringing your own.                  |
| <b>Reusable produce bags</b>     | Skip the thin plastic bags in the produce aisle — mesh or cloth bags work great. |
| <b>Say no to straws</b>          | Ask for no straw by default, or carry a reusable one for smoothies and drinks.   |

## In the Kitchen

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The kitchen is where most household plastic waste piles up — it's also where small changes are easiest to stick to.

### Try this:

- Store leftovers in glass jars or containers instead of plastic wrap or bags.
- Buy pantry staples (rice, oats, beans, spices) in bulk when possible to cut down on packaging.
- Switch to beeswax wrap or silicone lids for covering bowls and food.
- Choose bar soap and dish blocks over bottled liquid soap where available.
- Compost food scraps instead of bagging them for the trash.
- Use a French press, pour-over, or reusable filter instead of single-use coffee pods or filters.
- Buy milk, juice, and other drinks in glass or cardboard cartons when the option is available.
- Freeze leftovers in silicone freezer trays instead of single-use plastic bags.
- Keep a set of reusable cutlery and a cloth napkin at your desk to avoid grabbing disposables.

*Tip: you don't need to replace everything in your kitchen at once. When something single-use runs out, just try swapping in a reusable version next time.*

## Personal Care & Bathroom

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Bathroom products are one of the easiest categories to find plastic-free alternatives for.

### Try this:

- Swap liquid shampoo and conditioner bottles for shampoo/conditioner bars.
- Use a bamboo or other biodegradable toothbrush instead of plastic.
- Look for refill stations or bulk refill pouches for soap, shampoo, and lotion.
- Choose a safety razor or refillable razor over fully disposable ones.
- Try plastic-free floss (silk or bamboo fiber) where available.
- Switch from cotton rounds and disposable wipes to washable, reusable cloth rounds.
- Look for deodorant, lotion, and sunscreen in metal tins or paper packaging.
- Use a reusable menstrual cup or cloth pads as an alternative to disposable products.
- Choose bulk-size products over travel/mini sizes to cut down on packaging over time.

*Tip: many of these swaps also save money over time, since bar and refill products tend to last longer than their bottled equivalents.*

## When You're Out and About

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A little planning ahead makes it easy to skip single-use plastic when you're away from home.

### Try this:

- Keep a small "on-the-go kit" in your bag or car: reusable bag, utensils, straw, and container.
- Bring your own container for restaurant leftovers or takeout.
- Support local businesses that offer refill or bring-your-own-container programs.
- Choose loose produce over pre-packaged when grocery shopping.
- Pack snacks in reusable containers or beeswax wrap instead of single-use bags.
- Say "for here" instead of "to go" when eating at a restaurant, if you're staying anyway.
- Bring a reusable tote or backpack for errands so you're never caught without a bag.
- Pack a reusable water bottle before heading out instead of buying one on the go.
- When ordering delivery, add a note asking for no plastic cutlery, straws, or condiment packets.

*Tip: keeping your kit in the same spot (car door, bag pocket, entryway) makes it a lot easier to remember before you head out.*

## A Simple 30-Day Challenge

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Not sure where to start? Try adding one new habit each week this month. Check off each week as you go.

|               |                                                                             |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 1</b> | Bring a reusable bag every time you shop.                                   |
| <b>Week 2</b> | Swap one bathroom product (soap, shampoo, or razor) for a reusable version. |
| <b>Week 3</b> | Pack your own container for one takeout meal or restaurant leftovers.       |
| <b>Week 4</b> | Attend a Green Steps Alliance workshop or community event.                  |

*Missed a week, or want to go at your own pace? That's fine too — the goal is progress, not a perfect streak.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Isn't this expensive to get started?**

Not necessarily. Most reusable products cost more up front but pay for themselves quickly by replacing something you'd otherwise keep buying. You also don't need to buy everything at once — start with whatever single-use item you go through fastest.

### **What if I forget my reusable items?**

It happens to everyone. Keep a backup set in your car or bag so you're less likely to be caught without one, and don't be too hard on yourself when it slips.

### **Does my individual effort really make a difference?**

On its own, maybe not much — but that's exactly why Green Steps Alliance focuses on community. When neighbors, coworkers, and friends make the same small changes together, the impact adds up quickly.

### **I don't have time to attend a workshop. What else can I do?**

Start with a couple of swaps from this guide and subscribe to the newsletter — you'll still get simple tips and updates even if you can't make it to an event.

## Keep Going

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You don't have to do this alone. Green Steps Alliance runs free workshops, community events, and volunteer opportunities to help you go further — and meet others doing the same.

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Attend a workshop</b>           | Learn hands-on skills for reducing plastic waste at home.    |
| <b>Join a community event</b>      | Take part in local clean-ups and recycling drives.           |
| <b>Volunteer with us</b>           | Help run programs and outreach in your community.            |
| <b>Subscribe to our newsletter</b> | Get workshop announcements and tips delivered to your inbox. |

See all the ways to get involved at [greenstepsalliance.com/get-involved](https://greenstepsalliance.com/get-involved)

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Green Steps Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting sustainable living by empowering people to adopt eco-friendly practices.

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