

# Plastics a Plenty

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A straw for your soft drink, a candy bar wrapper, a plastic bag to carry groceries: taken individually they seem undamaging but together they are overwhelming our natural systems. Since the 1950s, the production of plastics has outpaced other materials. Many of the plastics that are produced are meant to be thrown away after just one use. These include items such as grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups, cutlery, etc. According to the US EPA, in 2018 landfills received 27 million tons of plastic.

Most plastics do not biodegrade. Instead they slowly break down into smaller fragments known as microplastics. Plastic waste causes a plethora of problems when it leaks into the environment. Plastic bags can block waterways and exacerbate natural disasters. By clogging sewers and providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes and pests, plastic bags can increase the transmission of vector-borne diseases like malaria. High concentrations of plastic materials, particularly plastic bags, have been found blocking the airways and stomachs of hundreds of species. Plastic bags are often ingested by turtles and dolphins who mistake them for food. There is evidence that the toxic chemicals added during the manufacturing of plastic transfer to animal tissue, eventually entering the human food chain.



Making small changes to reduce plastic in our everyday lives can help the plastic situation. Here are some ways that you can help reduce your consumption of plastics in your household:

1. Bring your own reusable straw with you to use in restaurants.
2. Use reusable produce bags and grocery bags and keep them in the car ready for use. A single plastic bag can take 1,000 years to degrade.
3. Choose products that are boxed instead of bottled.
4. Reuse containers for storing leftovers or shopping in bulk.
5. Use a reusable bottle or mug for your beverages.
6. Pack your own reusable fork, spoon and knife.

When you cannot eliminate plastic completely, make sure to recycle plastic when you are finished with it. Many options exist for recycling materials either through your municipality or other organizations. From recycling wrappers to recycling specialty plastics, make sure to contact your local solid waste district to find out local recycling options. For Warren County residents, you can contact Warren County Solid Waste District at 513.695.1209, or visit <https://www.co.warren.oh.us/solidwaste/>