

# SCIENCE FROM HOME



## Plastic ABCs

Plastic is everywhere - including in our oceans and waterways. Read through the Plastic ABCs to find out new information, learn ways to monitor your plastic use and get plastic use tips and tricks!

### Know before you begin

- The different activities can be done inside or outside, depending on the activity
- All supplies are easy to find, substitute or modify
- Adult supervision is recommended for some activities
- Please choose a safe space for these activities

### Plastic ABCs

- **Apple** - A is for Apple, but this lesson can apply to other produce! When you go grocery shopping, don't get a plastic bag to separate out produce. There are cloth bags you can use for your produce that you can reuse and bring each time you go shopping!
- **Bulk** - When possible, buy in bulk and use your own (ideally glass!) containers instead of single use plastic containers.
- **Cleanups** - Check local parks and beaches to see if they have cleanups scheduled. You can go and help clean an area in need. Don't forget that you can also pick up any litter you see yourself, as long as it is safe to do so.
- **Dehydrated cleaning products** - These cleaning products are "just add water!" and are often refillable! Check out [this VOX](#) article for some more information.
- **Eco-"friendly"** - Sometimes a product will claim to be "eco-friendly" or "green." While the U.S. Government does have guidance on what that means, companies can bend the meaning a bit. Check out this list to learn more about what these packaging labels mean.
- **Frozen Foods** - When possible, try to avoid or reduce the amount of frozen food you purchase. A lot of the packaging is plastic. Or, try to purchase frozen food that comes in cardboard boxes and can be recycled.

# SCIENCE

## FROM HOME



- **Glass** - When your current plastic items wear out naturally, you can replace them with glass options. This is great for things like food storage containers!
- **Habits** - Many of these suggestions are not a “one and done” solution. We need to make sure our choices become habits - things we do all the time that are natural to us. Everyone makes mistakes or slips on habits occasionally - that’s being human! But try your best to make these new choices habits!
- **Innovate** - When you have plastic that you have used, think about new and different ideas to reuse those items before disposal. Empty milk containers? Try making a bird feeder! Older kiddie pool? What about using it as a garden planter? There are so many fun and exciting ways to reuse products before sending them on their way!
- **Judgment** - Keep in mind, not everyone’s situation is the same. Some people have disabilities that mean they have to use certain products a certain way. Others may have allergies that keep them from using certain products. In some cases, people might not be able to afford certain options, because sometimes the “green” option is more expensive. Talk to people and try to educate, but don’t judge others - lead by example as much as possible!
- **Kitchen** - If you aren’t sure where to start with evaluating your plastic use, try an inventory of all the items that are plastic in the kitchen. See if there are any items that are worn out enough to replace now and make a list of things you can replace with non-plastic down the line. Remember, it is also wasteful to replace things just because - wait until the item has lived its life before replacing!
- **Laundry Detergent** - You can make your own laundry detergent instead of purchasing in plastic containers. Check out this recipe from Katie Marquardt, Manager of Membership and Appeals, who makes her own powdered laundry soap for her family of two adults and one child. This recipe lasts her about three months.

Ingredients measured as dry cups

Scant 2 cups Arm & Hammer Washing Soda

3 cups Borax

2 cups baking soda

½ cup LA’s Totally Awesome Oxygen Base Cleaner

4 oz bar of Kirk’s Gentle Castile Soap, grated

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl. Add the finished product to a container with a tight-fitting lid.

# SCIENCE

## FROM HOME



- **Microplastics** - Microplastics are tiny bits of plastic the size of a sesame seed. These can't be filtered out in water filtration systems, so they can end up in ocean or lake water. Make sure you aren't using personal care items with plastic microbeads in them - these are a type of microplastic!
- **Numbers on recyclables** - make sure you check the numbers on plastics to see if your local recycling program accepts the numbers in recycling. Not all locations accept all numbers and making sure you divide plastic properly is important!
- **Options** - Whenever you have the option to choose plastic or not plastic, choose not plastic! These options aren't always available to everyone all the time due to cost or ability - but if you have a choice, choose not plastic!
- **PPE** - With concerns about COVID-19, a question is, can I recycle PPE (personal protective equipment)? The answer is probably not. Check out [THIS ARTICLE](#) for more information, and remember, try to choose things like rewearable cloth masks and follow all proper cleaning procedures!
- **Question** - Question the products you use, the packaging they come in and everything you can! By asking questions, you may find better solutions, different answers and new and different things to try!
- **Reusable items** - Whenever possible, bring reusable items like coffee cups to the local coffee shop or reusable bags to the grocery store. Depending on the location, you might get a discount for bringing your own, or you might not get charged a plastic bag fee. To help you remember, try to keep some reusable bags in your car or by the door! There are also reusable bags that fold small enough to keep in a purse.
- **Straws** - when possible, bring a reusable plastic or silicone straw in place of a plastic straw, or say no to a straw in general. Please remember though, that some people with certain disabilities NEED to use straws, and sometimes plastic straws are their best option in specific situations.
- **Travel** - Be mindful about travel. Cars produce A LOT of emissions, as do planes. When possible (and safe!) try carpooling or taking public transportation.

# SCIENCE FROM HOME



- **Utensils** - When getting takeout or with your work or school lunch, bring your own metal, reusable utensils! For takeout, ask them to not include the plastic utensils - and if you can, say no to the tiny condiments in their single use plastic, too!
- **Village** - “It takes a village” is a common phrase to make a point about the importance of having a community. See what your community is doing to reduce plastic and other waste. Are there classes about waste reduction or other environmental causes? Is there a community composting program? Find out - and if not, think about if you are able to start the project!
- **Wax (beeswax!)** - Instead of using plastic wrap, use Beeswax Wraps to keep your food fresh, or to wrap a sandwich for lunch! Check out our Beeswax Wrap activity to make your own.
- **(e)Xamine your use through a home inventory** - Complete a home inventory to see what plastic items you have. Try to replace items (as they wear out!) with non-plastic alternatives. See the Science From Home activity [The Breakdown](#) for more information.
- **Yard** - There are many things you can do to reduce plastic in your yard! Don't use plastic garden pots - use ceramic pots or compostable pots. This goes for container gardening, too - try a metal or wood container. Choose tools that aren't made of plastic and consider sharing tools with others that you might not use very often. These are just some starting suggestions - check out [this article](#) for more!
- **Zero Waste** - Some folks try to get down to zero waste. There are people who generate so little trash that it can go in a single jar! However, this may not be attainable for all people. You can still do your part and try to lower your waste. Maybe try to reduce waste in just one aspect of your life!

## Resources

[Small Actions Spark Big Changes](#)

[It's Plastic Free July](#)

[PHILADELPHIA'S Recycling Guide: Dos & Don'ts](#)

[Plastics Recycling Fact Sheet](#)