



10 simple ways to eliminate plastic waste

Past issues of the week have featured several articles that have drawn attention to the evils of plastic waste. An excellent article by Bernadette Backer in one of the Week's first editions highlighted the problem of the increasing number of plastic bags being used and discarded in Oman, and urged local supermarket chains to consider using biodegradable plastic. Just a few weeks ago, a piece in the Green Column pointed out the hazards presented by durable plastic litter in the marine environment, which takes hundreds of years to decompose and can cause death by ingestion or entanglement for a number of marine species.

One of the most effective ways to reduce plastic (and glass and paper) waste in Oman, would be through recycling, which has proved extremely effective in other countries. In Germany and the Netherlands, for example, an extra charge is levied on every plastic or glass drinks container that is sold. This is refundable at most retailers, who will "buy back" your empty bottle, which will then be recycled. In these countries, householders also dutifully separate all their rubbish into at least five categories – biodegradable waste, paper, glass, aluminium, and plastic. Recycling of all these materials prevents them from going astray in the marine environment, or taking up unnecessary space in landfills. We do not yet have access to these types of recycling facilities in Oman, but with a growing population, growing consumption, and an increasing trend toward a "disposable" culture, concerned citizens should be asking for such facilities to be installed.

While we are waiting to join the rest of the recycling world, there are many things that you and your family can do to help minimize plastic waste. Here are some ideas:

- 1) Bring your own:** keep a stash of used plastic (or even better, durable cloth or mesh) shopping bags in your car. When you nip to the supermarket on the way home from work or school, take them into the shop with you. It may feel embarrassing at first, but you should feel proud, not embarrassed to let others know that you care enough about the environment to avoid waste. In many countries (like Holland), it is embarrassing (and expensive) to turn up at the supermarket without your own shopping bags. It is all a question of habit.
- 2) Fill it up:** ask the staff in the fruit and vegetable department and the check out counter at the supermarket to put as many things into each plastic bag as possible. They may do a double-take at first, when you ask them to put your carrots, cucumber, and coriander in the same bag – but they'll soon realize that it is no extra trouble for them, and you'll be giving them an important message.
- 3) Buy in bulk:** choose your shopping items carefully. Look for items with the least packaging. Choose items sold in bulk rather than individually wrapped single servings.





- 4) **Dare to refuse:** when shopping for non-consumable items, try to put your purchases from different shops into the first bag you receive, or refuse bags all together whenever you can. Is it really necessary to carry home your greeting card or single item of clothing in a plastic bag? Or can you carry it out to the car as it is? Explain to the shop assistant why you are refusing the unnecessary bag.
- 5) **Bigger can be better:** use large five-gallon bottles of water (like Oasis or Salsabeel) rather than 1.5 liter bottles. These bottles are reused many times, and cause very little plastic waste. There are very inexpensive pumps and dispensers for these if you don't want to splash out on a fancy cooling tower. If you like to use smaller bottles for traveling or sports, buy a few of them and try to make them last as long as possible by re-filling the smaller bottles from the dispenser.
- 6) **Re-use it:** try to re-use plastic packaging if possible. Yogurt and ice-cream tubs can make excellent storage containers for other household goods.
- 7) **Tupper ware!** Use plastic wrap and disposable plastic bags sparingly. Use durable containers for storing leftover foods in your fridge. These can be washed and re-used over and over again.
- 8) **Zip-lock it – again!** Re-use Ziploc bags whenever possible. Rinse them and turn them inside out to dry, and they'll work just as well the second time around!
- 9) **Rubbish!:** use leftover shopping bags (if you have any after adopting habits 1 and 2 above!) to line your rubbish bins and wastepaper baskets, rather than buying extra bags for this purpose.
- 10) **Dine in style:** use a durable set of plastic plates and proper cutlery when on camping trips or picnics rather than disposable plastic or paper items. It may take a little extra effort to package them up and take them home with you, but this will eliminate a lot of waste.

Think about it. Each of these suggestions actually requires very little extra effort on your part, but in the course of a week could save a big pile of plastic waste. Once these things become habit, you'll be amazed at how easy it is to continue. So as the saying goes: Just do it!!!