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ZERO WASTE TN



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

TDEC'S OFFICE OF POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

WHAT IS ZERO WASTE?



AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Zero waste is the ideology that traditional sources of waste can be rethought, reduced, reused, recycled, or re-earthed to prevent land, water, or air pollution or negative impacts to human or wildlife health. Zero waste is a perception change. It requires rethinking what we have traditionally regarded as garbage and treating all materials as valued resources instead. Zero waste entails changing consumption habits, making more conscious purchasing decisions, and maximizing the use of materials through the end of their useful life. Actions that support zero waste can include eliminating or preventing waste at the source and implementing waste reduction strategies further down a product's lifecycle such as reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In nature, there is no such thing as "waste." The by-product of one system is feedstock for another system. Only humans generate what we refer to as "waste," or the generation of materials with no beneficial end use.

Zero waste principles promote the most efficient use of materials to eliminate unnecessary waste and pollution. By adopting Zero Waste principles, we can greatly reduce our impact on Tennessee's environment, preserve our natural resources for future generations, and avoid financial costs associated with waste disposal.

HOW DO I BEGIN?

This guide for consumers provides categories for easy zero waste implementation, questions to help Tennesseans think like zero waste consumers, and common tips and real-world suggestions on how to get started. Tips throughout the guide are numbered from most environmentally beneficial to least beneficial, although there is sometimes overlap between categories or actions included in one section that may be applicable in others.

The term zero waste can seem intimidating, but it is important to understand that it is used to inspire a less wasteful lifestyle. It does not literally mean to generate no waste at all. Our environmental footprints are too large and complicated to simply eliminate our impact and waste generation overnight. However, it is very important to be conscious of the waste we do generate and to incorporate earth-friendly choices into our daily actions. The easiest way to make a positive impact is one step at a time. So, let's get started!





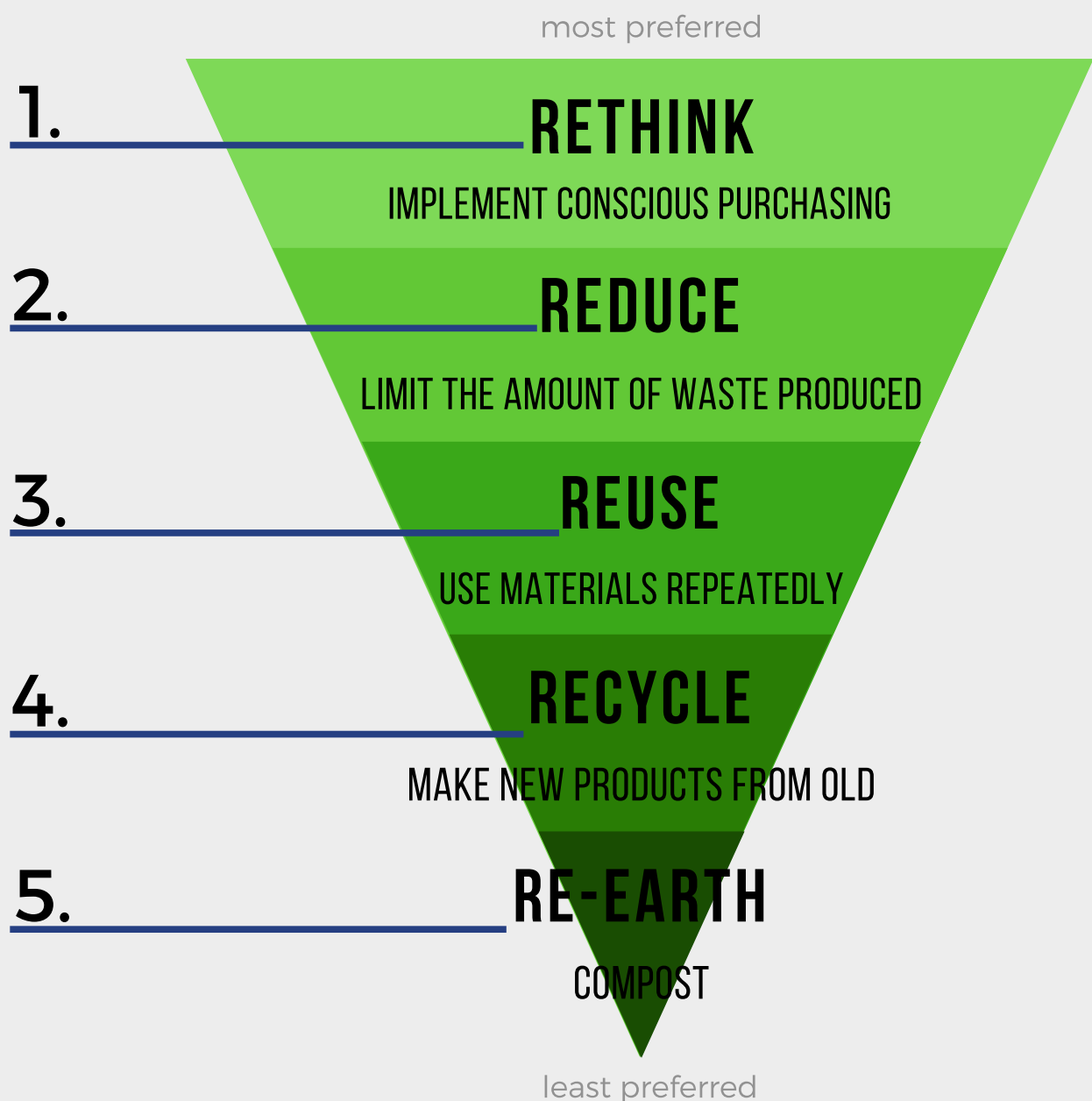
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ZERO WASTE HIERARCHY

THE HIGHEST AND BEST USE OF MATERIALS

The Zero Waste Hierarchy is a sequence of practices that support the zero waste system. The hierarchy lists the 5 R's of zero waste in order of most to least preferred. While this particular order is most beneficial and effective, they do not necessarily have to be performed in this order.





ZERO WASTE PURCHASING

RETHINKING YOUR PURCHASING DECISIONS

Making zero-waste-friendly purchasing decisions is key to reaching your zero waste goals. The easiest way to go zero waste is to avoid purchasing a product in the first place! And for the products that you do need to purchase, there are ways to select products that are likely to result in less waste throughout their lifetime of use. It is truly impossible to reduce your waste and your footprint without incorporating conscious purchasing decisions into your daily life. It may sound intimidating at first, but often implementing these practices can make purchasing more efficient, cost-effective, and less frequent. Check with your preferred local stores for zero waste, bulk, and low-packaging options first. Speak to customer representatives regarding your wants and needs for these items.

ZERO WASTE FACT:

Did you know that even though the U.S. only makes up 5% of the world's population, we produce 40% of the world's total trash? And 30% of that is from household packaging waste.

Benefits

- It can save consumers money by purchasing long lasting, durable products which require replacing less frequently.
- Helps your local economy by supporting small, local businesses. It also helps to promote sustainable and earth-friendly business growth.
- It can save consumers money when manufacturers share the cost savings of using less packaging with the consumer.

Challenges

- It can be difficult or time consuming to locate products that use or promote sustainable packaging, locally sourced items, recycled content or recyclable items.
- It can be overwhelming to try to re-think every single purchasing decision, so start small with one or two things at a time to make it more manageable.
- Marketing can create pressure to purchase trendy items or impulse buy.



ACTION ITEMS

1. RETHINK

Adjust purchasing behaviors and implement conscious purchasing. Evaluate your true need of items to avoid impulse purchasing, and think about the value that you anticipate deriving from the product - both long term and short term. The key notion consists of purchasing only what is truly needed, choosing local products, items with no or minimal packaging when possible, and choosing durable, easily repaired, recycled, and recyclable materials. As a consumer, every purchase made is an opportunity to support zero waste.

What are some ways that you can rethink your purchasing decisions to reduce the associated waste?

- Avoid purchasing individually wrapped or packaged items.
- Purchase in bulk amounts to reduce packaging waste.
- Choose paper or paperboard packaging over plastic or Styrofoam.
- Buy local. Local products, including food, travel less distance and often require less or no packaging to maintain freshness.
- Visit your local library or join a book sharing club.
- Opt for renting or sharing versus buying if the item is only needed seldom.
- Choose digital or electronic reading material and switch to online magazine subscriptions.
- Choose to subscribe in e-billing and avoid paper statements.
- Choose to support stores and businesses that offer environmentally friendly packaging options.
- Look for local repair options or tutorials online to extend the life of products.

2. REDUCE

Make purchasing decisions that reduce unnecessary waste. There are many easy, effective, and cost-saving ways to reduce and eliminate unnecessary waste simply by avoiding it in the first place.

What items do you purchase that might be cheap or convenient, but are wasteful and could be avoided?

- Bottled water can be replaced with a refillable bottle.
- To-go food and drink containers can be replaced with pre-made snacks packed in reusable containers.
- Paper napkins or paper towels can be replaced with reusable cloth versions.
- Single-serve coffee pods can be replaced with compostable versions or a French press.
- Plastic cups can be replaced with a reusable tumbler.
- Sticky notes can be replaced with a digital reminder or phone app.
- Trendy gadgets can be replaced with a single reliable, durable version.

3.

REUSE

Consider reusability and durability of the products you purchase. Look for items that are designed to last and are repairable, as quality is an important aspect of zero waste purchasing. Buying second-hand is also a great way of minimizing the environmental impact of your purchasing. Shop at thrift stores and other used product stores to save money and resources.

What do you look for when purchasing durable, quality goods?

- Find a few name brands that you know and trust. Consider things like ethical employment, local and sustainably sourced, USA made, and sustainable packaging. For more suggestions, view our eco-labels list in the Tools and Resource section.
- Look for a warranty or product guarantee or items that are easily repairable.
- Compare price over lifetime of product.
- Look for products that are handmade and/or locally made with locally sourced or sustainably sourced materials.

What are some items that you can donate to or purchase from a local non-profit or thrift store to support reuse?

- Clothing
- Kitchen appliances
- Dishes and Cookware
- Home Décor
- Furniture
- Purses and Bags
- Toys
- Tools
- Books

4.

RECYCLE

Consider recycled content and recyclability of purchased items. Check with your local recycling provider or facility to learn what they accept. Pay attention to recycling labels before purchasing an item. Choose a recyclable alternative whenever available. Paying attention to the following tips will help ensure that packaging from your purchases has the largest chance to be recycled or used locally for a beneficial purpose.

Which items do you purchase that have necessary packaging?

- Choose aluminum cans instead of glass or plastic drink bottles.
- Opt for box wines over glass wine bottles.
- Always opt for paper or paperboard packaging over plastic or Styrofoam.
- Check labels to see if packaging is recycled or has recycled content. (just because you see a triangle with arrows doesn't necessarily mean that item is recyclable).
- Opt for post-consumer recycled content (diverted after consumer use) over pre-consumer (diverted during manufacturing process).

Which products do you purchase that can be made from post-consumer recycled materials or are recyclable themselves?

- Light bulbs
- Batteries
- Electronics
- Ink cartridges
- Clothing
- Eyeglasses
- Rugs
- Carpet
- Appliances

Consider packaging or products that cannot be recycled, but may be compostable. Check with your residential organics service provider to see which compostable packaging they may accept and check labels for home versus commercial composting if adding to your backyard bin. Additionally, sometimes soiled items are not able to be recycled and composting can be a viable alternative to throwing compostable soiled items into the trash.

What items do you purchase that may have a compostable alternative?

- Frozen meal containers
- Disposable cups and bowls
- Q-tips (paper or bamboo over plastic)
- Single use coffee pods

ZERO WASTE PURCHASING RESOURCES

Local Farmers Markets: PickTN

Locate Bulk & Zero Waste Stores in TN:

Zero Waste Home App

Online Grocery Shopping: Misfits Market, Thrive Market, Azure Standard

Green Cleaning Products: Seventh Generation, Method, Blueland, Norwex, Cleancult

Laundry and Dish Detergents: Dropps, Earth Breeze, Tru Earth

Bath and Body Products: Plaine Products, by Humankind, Etsy

Local Handmade Items: Etsy

All-inclusive zero waste purchasing: Net Zero Waste Company, Zero Waste Cartel, The Earthling Co., Mighty Nest, Grove Collaborative

**this is not an inclusive list*





ZERO WASTE KITCHEN

CUT BACK ON KITCHEN WASTE

Kitchens are the source of a lot of waste, which means that there are numerous opportunities to implement zero waste habits in kitchens. From purchasing decisions to prepping, cooking, storing and preserving, our daily habits can get pretty wasteful. Reaching a true zero waste kitchen may seem like an impossible task, but there are many quick and easy tips that can save you time and money and cut out your kitchen waste!

ZERO WASTE FACT:

Food waste represents the largest percentage of waste landfilled in the US, with over 75% of food waste generated being landfilled, while only 6% is composted.

Benefits

- Zero waste kitchen practices can save you money from avoided purchasing costs of single-use disposable items, and through better food storage and preservation, meaning less kitchen and food waste.
- Zero waste kitchen practices help keep recycling streams clean by avoiding unwashed, soiled, or unrecyclable single-use plastics and aluminum foil.

Challenges

- Implementing new cooking and storing habits and changing traditional kitchen behaviors can be intimidating.
- Finding alternatives to traditional storage and preserving methods might pose a learning curve.
- Finding locations to purchase items in bulk and with preferred packaging options may be challenging.



ACTION ITEMS

1. RETHINK

Many staple kitchen items that we have grown accustomed to for convenience are actually unnecessary and generate a lot of waste and reoccurring expenses. Rethink your kitchen staples and determine which items are easy to do without or replace with a durable, reusable option. Often zero waste replacements work just as well or better than their disposable counterparts.

What traditional kitchen items and behaviors can you rethink to reduce or eliminate waste?

- Zip loc bags can be replaced with reusable silicone baggies or other reusable storage containers.
- Plastic wrap can be replaced with reusable silicone stretch lids or cloth bowl covers.
- Aluminum foil for baking can be replaced with silicone baking sheets or mats.
- Aluminum foil for storage can be replaced with reusable cloth beeswax food wrap.
- Single-use muffin or cupcake liners can be replaced with silicone baking cups.
- Paper towels can be replaced with reusable cleaning cloths.
- Paper napkins can be replaced with reusable cloth napkins.
- Disposable coffee cups can be replaced with a travel thermos or tumbler.
- Plastic water bottles can be replaced with a filter pitcher.
- Dish sponges can be replaced with a washcloth, bamboo or wooden scrubbing brush, or natural fiber scourer.
- Single-use or disposable storage containers replaced with glass, stainless steel, or reusable plastic preserve ware.

2. REDUCE

There are many easy, effective, and cost-saving ways to reduce and eliminate unnecessary kitchen waste simply by avoiding it in the first place.

What items do you use in your kitchen that may not be needed at all, or only needed infrequently?

- Paper plates
- Disposable silverware
- Disposable straws

What kitchen staples do you purchase that have a waste-reducing alternative?

- Purchase meats from your local meat market or your grocery butcher to reduce Styrofoam and plastic wrap waste (most butchers wrap fresh cuts in paper).
- Avoid pre-cut produce wrapped in Styrofoam and plastic wrap and instead opt for whole, loose fruits or vegetables. This reduces unnecessary waste and saves you money.

ACTION ITEMS

- When shopping in the produce section, bring your own reusable produce bags and avoid the plastic produce bags.
- Bring your own containers and purchase in bulk whenever possible such as loose grains, nuts and seeds, coffee, nut butters, herbs and spices, dried fruit etc. (remember to know your tare weight!).
- Instead of tea bags, opt for loose leaf tea. You can use a reusable tea infuser or your French press to make fresh tea.
- Single-serve brewing pods can be replaced with a French press, or switch to a compostable/recyclable option.

3.

REUSE

Consider reusability and durability of items that you may already have in your kitchen. Instead of purchasing new storage containers or kitchen accessories, consider reusing or repurposing items that you already have. The most sustainable and waste-free items are the ones you already own.

What items do you already have that could be reused to reduce your kitchen waste?

- Glass jars make great storage or to-go containers.
- Bulk packaging jars from wholesale stores can be used as reusable containers for freezing or storing food or pantry items.
- Old t-shirts can be repurposed to make grocery bags or kitchen cloths.
- Old pillowcases can be repurposed to make grocery bags or bulk bin bags.
- Reuse food scraps or leftovers in new recipes. You can make homemade stocks, croutons, sauces, or pesto.

4.

RECYCLE

Be conscious about your kitchen waste recycling and be sure you're following local protocols. Contaminated recyclables that have food residue on them can ruin an entire load of recycling, so it is important to recycle properly to achieve the associated environmental benefit. Additionally, be sure you are only placing accepted items in your bin.

Which remaining items in your kitchen waste are usually recyclable?

- Glass drink bottles
- Aluminum cans
- Plastic packaging labeled 1-7 (check which plastics are accepted locally)
- Paper bags
- Paperboard and cardboard boxes
- Metal food cans
- Brita Filters ([Brita Recycling Program](#))
- Wine Corks (ReCORK, Cork Club)

22% of waste that ends up in landfills is food. Composting food waste is a more environmentally friendly option to landfilling because it avoids greenhouse gases and produces a beneficial soil amendment. Residential composting options are often available in larger cities, and backyard composting is a viable option for those who have the space to do so. There are even indoor composting options for those with limited outdoor space!

What kitchen waste items are remaining that can be composted instead of landfilled?

- Any soiled paper products not coated in wax or film.
- Scrap kitchen produce such as veggie caps, peelings, stems, etc.
- Leftover or spoiled fruits and vegetables that are no longer edible.

ZERO WASTE KITCHEN KIT

- Beeswax wrap
- Silicone baggies
- Stainless steel containers
- Glass containers
- Natural fiber scourers, compostable sponges, natural fiber scrubbers and brushes
- Refillable dish soap options
- French press (for coffee, tea, etc.)
- Produce bags
- Veggie bags and produce preservers
- Reusable grocery or tote bags
- Silicone baking cups
- Silicone baking sheets
- Cloth bowl covers
- Reusable silicone bowl covers
- Up-paper towels
- Cloth napkins

**this is not an inclusive list*





ZERO WASTE HOUSEHOLD

CLEANING AND PERSONAL PRODUCTS

Our daily habits and behaviors can generate a lot of waste through cleaning, personal care, and other household routines. It may seem like these typical household items are not significant to waste production, but the waste and associated impacts they generate can add up quickly. One of the most effective waste eliminating methods is to establish a streamlined cleaning routine and personal care regimen and stick with products that you know and trust. Traditional household cleaners and personal care products typically have high water content, meaning you are paying for water and not just the product itself; these products are often packaged in single-use plastic bottles, designed to be used once then thrown away. These items are wasteful and can be easily eliminated or replaced with a zero waste alternative.

ZERO WASTE FACT:

Although 75% of America's waste is recyclable, we only recycle around 30% of that. The plastics recycling rate is the lowest of all categories at 4%.

Benefits

- It can save consumers money by using long lasting, durable, homemade, or refillable products which require replacing less frequently or are cheaper to make yourself.
- It can help to keep our streams, rivers, and waterways clean by avoiding harmful chemicals and pollutants, and by using more environmentally preferred cleaners and household products.

Challenges

- It can be difficult or time consuming to locate new providers or specialty stores that offer products that use or promote less waste, refillable options, or locally sourced items.
- It can be overwhelming to modify cleaning methods, personal care routines, and at-home habits, so start small and implement one or two things at a time to make it more manageable.



ACTION ITEMS

1. RETHINK

Rethink your traditional daily behaviors: cleaning schedule, home maintenance, personal care, and any other miscellaneous categories. Many traditional household items that we have grown accustomed to are incredibly wasteful and can impact our environment in negative ways. Fortunately, there are easy and cost-effective alternatives.

What traditional household items and behaviors can you rethink to reduce or eliminate waste?

- Disposable hand soap, dish soap, and laundry detergent dispensers can be replaced with refillable containers.
- Single-use household cleaners can be replaced with reusable dispensers and bulk refills.
- Single-use cleaning, antibacterial, or disinfectant wipes can be replaced with reusable and washable cloths for many applications.
- Single-use mop cloths and dusters can be replaced with reusable/washable versions.
- Disposable dryer sheets can be replaced with reusable wool dryer balls.
- Some chemical cleaners can be replaced with home-made waste-free versions.
- Shampoo, shower gel, shaving gel, and conditioner bottles can be replaced with shampoo, soap, and conditioner bars.
- Single-use dental floss dispensers can be replaced with a refillable dispenser.
- Toothpaste tubes can be replaced with refillable tablets.
- Disposable makeup and beauty product containers can be replaced with refillable versions.
- Disposable women's hygiene products can be replaced with reusable alternatives.

2. REDUCE

Make cleaning and self-care decisions that reduce unnecessary waste. There are many easy, effective, and cost-saving ways to reduce and eliminate unnecessary waste simply by avoiding it in the first place.

Which items do you use in your household that may not be needed or could be avoided?

- Specialty cleaners
- Disposable cleaning wipes
- Dryer sheets
- Fabric softener
- Air fresheners
- Disposable toilet brush
- Disposable razors
- Disposable make-up remover wipes

3.

REUSE

Consider the reusability and durability of items that you may already have and can use and reuse in your home. Instead of purchasing new refillable containers or reusable accessories, consider reusing or repurposing items that you already have.

What items do you already have that could be used to reduce your household waste through reuse?

- Old bath towels, wash cloths, t-shirts, socks, or other cotton clothing items can be used to make cleaning or dust rags.
- Plastic spray bottles can be refilled with homemade or concentrated cleaners.
- Old toothbrushes can be used as cleaning brushes.
- Laundry detergent containers can be refilled with homemade or concentrated versions.

4.

RECYCLE

Be conscious about home products disposal and recycling and be sure you're following local protocols. Many types of plastics are used in household and personal products, and just because a container may be made with plastic that does not necessarily mean it is recyclable. Be cautious of and avoid purchasing compressed air containers, hazardous chemicals, pump dispensers, and other potentially unrecyclable items. Contaminated or improperly sorted recyclables can ruin an entire load of recycling, so it is important to recycle properly to achieve the associated environmental benefit. Additionally, be sure you are only placing accepted items in your bin.

Which recyclable items are used during cleaning and personal care practices?

- Cardboard packaging
- Paper and paperboard packaging
- 1-7 plastic containers (where accepted)
- Glass cleaning, spray, or beauty product bottles (remove lids)
- Mascara wands (Wands for Wildlife)
- Contact lenses (One by One Recycling Program)

Consider packaging or products that cannot be recycled, but may be able to be composted. Check with your residential organics service provider to see which compostable packaging they may accept and check labels for home versus commercial composting if adding to your backyard bin. Additionally, sometimes soiled items are not able to be recycled and composting can be a viable alternative to throwing compostable soiled items into the trash.

Which remaining items used during household cleaning or personal care routines can be composted instead of landfilled?

- Paper or bamboo Q-tips or swabs
- Natural fiber dental floss
- Bamboo toothbrushes
- Vacuum canister remains (pet hair, dirt, dust)
- Cotton balls (make sure they're 100% cotton)

ZERO WASTE HOUSEHOLD KIT

- Shampoo, conditioner, soap, and bath bars
- Reusable cotton rounds or makeup removing pads
- Reusable sanitary products
- Refillable makeup and beauty products
- Waste free razors
- Refillable dental floss
- Bamboo Toothbrush
- Refillable toothpaste and mouthwash tablet
- Wool dryer balls
- Reusable cleaning cloths, mops, and dusters
- Homemade cleaners
- Refillable dish and laundry detergents
- Refillable household cleaners
- Reusable natural fiber cleaning cloths

• **this is not an inclusive list*



A collection of sustainable travel items including bamboo cutlery, a reusable water bottle, and a mesh bag.

ZERO WASTE TRAVELING

REDUCE WASTE ON THE ROAD

Zero waste traveling may seem inconvenient or intimidating at first, but it is an excellent way to streamline trips, cut out unnecessary waste, and reduce travel costs. Travel can be any distance, length of time, or mode of transportation. It is important to consider zero waste practices in even the shortest of trips – to and from work, the grocery store and other errands – and long-distance trips and vacations. You can practice zero waste traveling principles in your personal vehicle, airplanes, trains, buses, bikes, and more.

ZERO WASTE FACT:

Did you know that it takes 1.39 liters of water to produce a 1-liter water bottle? By bringing your own reusable bottle, you're not only helping reduce the 70 million plastic water bottles Americans consume each day, but you're saving water too!

Benefits

- It can save you money from avoided impulse or convenience purchases while on the road.
- It can help keep our roadways and natural areas clean by preventing litter. Less waste means less opportunity for litter.
- It can also save you money from avoided packaging or container expenses by bringing your own travel containers, cups, or mugs.

Challenges

- Planning ahead and preparing zero waste travel items can be time consuming.
- Diverting from the “norm” while travelling may seem intimidating.
- It can be difficult or time consuming to locate stores that support the use of reusable travel products.



ACTION ITEMS

1. RETHINK

Rethink your traditional travel behaviors and evaluate which items are easy to do without or replace with a durable, reusable option. Many quick-stop and fast food items that we have grown accustomed to for convenience generate unnecessary waste and expenses.

What traditional travel behaviors can you rethink to reduce or eliminate waste?

- Avoid grab-and-go snacks wrapped in single-use plastic packaging - pack your own snacks for flights or road trips.
- Avoid plastic drink bottles - pack a reusable water bottle. (limited on space? Find a collapsible bottle!)
- Avoid single-use coffee cups - pack a reusable coffee cup or thermos.
- Avoid plastic-wrapped airplane blankets - bring your own jacket or scarf that can double as a blanket.
- Avoid single-use hotel or travel-sized toiletries, soaps, and amenities - pack your own shampoo and soap bars.
- Avoid leaving food that will spoil at home while away - eat, freeze, give away, or compost perishable food and drink items before leaving.
- Avoid food waste during your trip - plan to keep leftovers when eating out and bring a reusable to-go food container with you. Be sure to book a room with a refrigerator.

2. REDUCE

Make travel decisions that reduce unnecessary waste. There are many easy, effective, and cost-saving ways to reduce and eliminate unnecessary waste simply by avoiding it in the first place.

Which items do you traditionally throw away after or during travel that could be avoided?

- Receipts - opt out of receiving one or choose an electronic version.
- Styrofoam cups - bring your own reusable travel tumbler.
- Plastic silverware - bring your own reusable travel utensils.
- To-go food packaging - pack your own snacks in reusable containers.
- Plastic bags - bring a travel tote.
- Napkins or tissues - bring your own cloth napkin, towel, and/or handkerchief.
- Paper Tickets - go paperless for boarding passes, itineraries, or event tickets.
- Plastic straws - bring your own reusable stainless steel, glass, or bamboo straw.

3.

REUSE

Consider the reusability and durability of items that you may already have and can use and reuse during travel. Instead of purchasing new travel containers or accessories, consider reusing or repurposing items that you already have.

Which items do you use during travel that could be replaced with a reusable, durable alternative that you may already have?

- Magazines or books can be replaced with an e-reader, audiobook, or other electronic book option.
- Disposable airplane headphones can be avoided by bringing your own reusable set.
- Travel-sized toiletries can be replaced with a homemade version using reusable containers you likely already have. Metal spice tins, glass condiment jars, or leftover beauty product bottles make excellent DIY travel toiletry containers.

4.

RECYCLE

Be conscious about your travel waste recycling and be sure you're following local protocols - wherever you may be. Since recycling protocols vary so widely between areas, it is important to eliminate as much waste as possible through the previous zero waste practices to avoid recycling contamination or landfilling of items.

Which wasteful items are used during travel but can usually be recycled?

- Aluminum drink cans
- Paper and paperboard packaging
- 1-7 plastic containers (where accepted)
- Glass Bottles (where accepted)

5.

RE-EARTH

Consider packaging or products that cannot be recycled, but may be compostable. Like recycling, composting while traveling can be unfeasible if there are no free local options or if it is not offered at your hotel, resort, or destination. It is important to eliminate as much waste as possible through the previous zero waste practices and be conscious of food waste when eating out. If you are on a short commute or day long trip, compostable items can be easily stored in a reusable container like a mason jar until you return home.

Which remaining items used during travel can be composted instead of landfilled?

- Soiled paper bags and to-go containers without plastic or wax film
- Leftover compostable foods (most items except meat and dairy)
- Labelled compostable cups, bowls, or silverware
- Used napkins

ZERO WASTE TRAVEL KIT

- Reusable bottle or tumbler
- Collapsible bottles and cups
- Reusable coffee mugs
- Reusable snack bags
- Reusable travel containers
- Reusable straws
- Travel napkins or handkerchief
- Travel utensils
- Travel totes
- E-reader
- Headphones

**this is not an inclusive list*





ZERO WASTE OFFICE

WORK TO REDUCE OFFICE WASTE

Whether working from home or in an office, sometimes our daily essential work tasks can create a lot of waste. From pens and paper to ink and toner, there are numerous items that we use that have negative effects on our environment. Incorporating zero waste practices into our daily work routines can have a huge impact on the waste we create.

ZERO WASTE FACT:

In 2017, the largest category of municipal solid waste generated was paper and cardboard at 25 percent, or 67 million tons. By reducing unnecessary paper usage and going digital you can help reduce the 70% of office waste that is paper.

Benefits

- Zero waste office practices can save you and your company money by avoiding unnecessary purchases or purchasing more durable supplies.
- Zero waste office practices can streamline productivity, increase efficiency, and help you stay organized by using more digital technology and reducing clutter.

Challenges

- Employees may feel intimidated or powerless to incorporate new practices in the workplace.
- It can be difficult or time consuming to locate new vendors or stores that provide the necessary supplies in a sustainable or waste-free option.
- Establishing a new work routine may seem overwhelming so it is important to start small and work your way into new zero waste activities.



ACTION ITEMS

1. RETHINK

Rethink your traditional work behaviors and evaluate your supply needs. Many office items that we have grown accustomed to for convenience are unnecessary items that generate a lot of waste and reoccurring expenses. Rethink your office practices and evaluate which items are easy to do without or replace with a durable, reusable option.

What are some traditional work methods you can rethink to prevent or reduce waste in the office?

- Stay digital as much as possible: only print materials when necessary and choose digital note taking over pen and paper.
- Print on both sides of the paper.
- Use scrap paper for note taking.
- Use digital apps and devices for note taking, reminders, editing, and team reviewing.
- Avoid Styrofoam and plastic bubble wrap packaging. Instead opt for paper, cardboard, and paper envelopes to package items.
- Switch to e-billing.
- Sign up for electronic newsletter and magazine subscriptions.

2. REDUCE

Make work decisions that reduce unnecessary waste. There are many easy, effective, and cost-saving ways to reduce and eliminate unnecessary waste simply by avoiding it in the first place.

Which items do you traditionally throw away in the office that could be avoided?

- Receipts
- Single-use coffee cups
- Disposable Utensils
- To-go food packaging
- Plastic bags
- Staples
- Sticky notes

ACTION ITEMS

3.

REUSE

Consider the reusability and durability of items that you may already have and can use and reuse during your workday. Instead of purchasing new items or supplies, consider reusing or repurposing items that you already have.

Which wasteful items do you use during office hours that could be replaced with a reusable, durable alternative?

- Disposable pens can be replaced with a durable, refillable option.
- Staples can be replaced with paper clips or reusable clips.
- Disposable markers can be replaced with refillable markers.
- Disposable drink cups can be replaced with a refillable tumbler.
- Disposable coffee cups can be replaced with reusable coffee mug.
- Plastic straws can be replaced with a reusable stainless steel, glass, or bamboo straw.
- Plastic silverware can be replaced with a reusable utensil set (keep one at home, in your vehicle, and at work!).
- Grab and go and to-go food packaging, snacks packaging, and candy wrappers can all be replaced by planning ahead and packing your own snacks or lunch in reusable containers.
- Single use coffee pods can be replaced with reusable coffee pods or a French press.

4.

RECYCLE

Be conscious about your work waste recycling and be sure you're following local protocols. Some work items can be more difficult to locate recycling facilities than traditional household items. If your workplace does not offer recycling, store your daily recyclables in a reusable tote bag and bring them home or to a convenience center to recycle. Additionally, be sure you are only placing accepted items in your bin.

Which wasteful items are used during work that can be recycled?

- Paper envelopes
- Paper and paperboard packaging
- Ink and Toner cartridges
- Cardboard boxes
- Electronics
- Batteries

Which office supplies have recycled content alternatives?

- Printer paper (be sure to choose 100% post-consumer content wrapped in paper, not plastic)
- Envelopes
- Ink cartridges
- Clip boards
- Paper clips
- Pens
- Pencils
- Chair mats

Consider packaging or products that cannot be recycled, but may be compostable. Check with your residential organics service provider to see which compostable packaging they may accept. Additionally, soiled items are sometimes not able to be recycled and composting can be a viable alternative.

Which remaining items used at the office can be composted instead of landfilled?

- Soiled paper bags and to-go containers without plastic or wax film
- Leftover compostable foods (most items except meat and dairy)
- Labelled compostable cups, bowls, or silverware
- Used napkins
- Shredded paper

ZERO WASTE OFFICE KIT

- Refillable pens
- Refillable dry-erase markers
- 100% post-consumer Recycled paper, envelopes, and other paper products
- Digital reminders, notepads, and notetaking
- Digital team sharing and editing platforms
- Choose USA made products or supplies
- Recycled packaging tape
- Recycled ink cartridges
- Reusable single serve coffee pods
- French Press
- Reusable travel mug
- Reusable water bottle
- Reusable travel tumbler
- Reusable travel utensil set
- Reusable straw
- Reusable lunch and snack containers

**this is not an inclusive list*



TOOLS & RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR YOUR ZERO WASTE JOURNEY

Zero Waste Tips: [TEC Go Zero Waste](#)

Locate Bulk & Zero Waste Stores in TN: [Zero Waste Home](#)

Local Farmers Markets: [PickTN](#)

Online Grocery Shopping: [Misfits Market](#), [Thrive Market](#), [Azure Standard](#)

Green Cleaning Products: [Seventh Generation](#), [Method](#), [Blueland](#), [Norwex](#), [Cleancult](#)

Laundry and Dish Detergents: [Dropps](#), [Earth Breeze](#), [Tru Earth](#)

Bath and Body Products: [Plaine Products](#), [by Humankind](#), [Etsy](#)

Textiles, Clothing, and Bags: [Rent the Runway](#), [Patagonia](#), [Poshmark](#), [Rareform](#), [Public Thread](#)

Local Handmade Items: [Etsy](#)

Zero Waste Home and Personal Products: [Net Zero Waste Company](#), [Zero Waste Cartel](#), [The Earthling Co.](#), [Mighty Nest](#), [Grove Collaborative](#)

Repair Guides: [iFixit](#)

Recycling Resources: [Terracycle](#), [Electronics Recycling](#), [Recycle Right TN](#), [Earth911](#)

Eco-Labels: [Environmental Labels in North America](#)

Household Hazardous Waste: [TDEC HHW Program](#)

Reduce Litter: [Nobody Trashes Tennessee](#)

Food Waste Reduction Tips: [Get Food Smart TN](#), [EPA](#)

Locate Compost Drop-Offs While Traveling: [ShareWaste](#)



Compost Service Providers in TN:

Chattanooga:

- [Compost House](#) – commercial and residential collection services for a fee.

Johnson City:

- [Hoffman Composting](#) – residential drop-off centers as well as residential collection services for a fee. Subscription includes 2 bags of premium screened compost annually.

Knoxville:

- [Green Heron Compost](#) – organics collections services for homes or small businesses and offers monthly or pay-as-you-go subscription options.

Memphis:

- [The Compost Fairy](#) – residential drop-off centers as well as commercial and residential collection services for a fee.

Nashville:

- [Compost Nashville](#) – commercial and residential collection services for a fee. Subscription includes bi-annual complimentary compost.
- [The Compost Company](#) – free residential drop-off centers as well as commercial and residential collection services for a fee.

Backyard Composting: [TDEC Residential Composting](#), [TDEC Backyard Composting Brochure](#), [EPA Composting at Home](#), [Metro Nashville Dirt on Composting](#), [Come Post Your Compost](#)

Indoor or Small-space Composting: [Bokashi Composting](#), [Indoor Composting](#), [Vermiculture Composting](#)

Discount Locations for Bringing Your Own Drink Cup or Mug: Caribou Coffee, Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, Einstein Bros. Bagels, Flying J, Peet's Coffee & Tea, Pilot, Port City Java, Tim Horton's

