

Moving towards Zero Waste

Pelham Sustainability Committee
September 2023

Last updated 10/2/23

This is a living document! To suggest additions or revisions, please email
jessica.g.barr@gmail.com.

Purpose and overview

- What is Zero Waste, and why is it important?
- The five R's
- What can we do? - Tips and strategy swap

What is Zero Waste?

- No trash, minimal recycling
- Eliminating disposable plastics
- The problem(s) with recycling
 - Recycling numbers aren't reliable indicators*
 - Greenwashing*
 - Gradual breakdown of plastics
 - Microplastic pollution (air, water) in the recycling process**

* "Recycling's 'Magic' Numbers," *Recycle Smart Newsletter*, May 22, 2023

** Matt Simon, "Yet Another Problem with Recycling: It Spews Microplastics," *Wired*, May 5, 2023

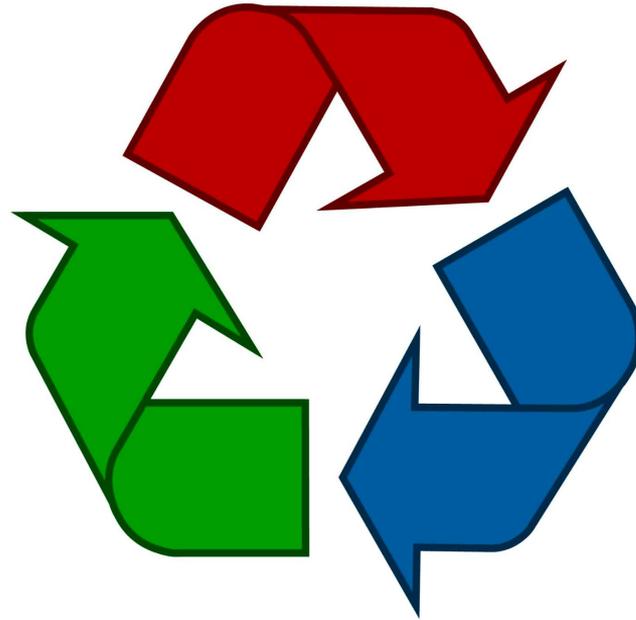
What is Zero Waste?

- No trash, no (or minimal) recycling
- How do we get there?
 - Start with the source
 - Our choices matter
 - The problem of perfection

The Five R's

Recycling Trilogy

Reduce Reuse Recycle



Powered by [Recycling.com](https://www.Recycling.com)

The Five R's

- Refuse
- Reduce
- Reuse [and Repair]
- Rot
- Recycle

From Johnson, Bea. *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. (Available at Pelham Library through Interlibrary Loan.)

A few basic steps....

- Think through each purchase:
 - How is it packaged?
 - What will you do with that packaging?
 - How did it get to you?
 - Where did it come from?
- Don't let perfection deter you—do what you can

A few basic steps....

- Get creative!
 - Make stuff
 - What can you do without?
- Compost
- Use cloth instead of paper whenever possible
- Use the library
 - Books and movies, toys, puzzles, science kits
 - Repair cafés, the Library of Things (coming soon!)

What can we do? –The biggest problems

- Food/groceries
- Clothes
- Cleaning products
- Home repair
- Personal grooming
- Kids' stuff
- Travel
- Pharmacy products
- Online purchasing
- Pet products
- Garden supplies

- Construction and home improvement
- Furniture, mattresses, pillows, rugs
- Post-disasters—all household goods
- Holiday stuff

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Food/groceries

- Compost
- Buy bulk—where?
 - Whole Foods (oats, lentils, nuts, chocolates, dried peas, beans)
 - River Valley Coop (Beans, grains, nuts, coffee, herbs and spices, teas, honey and syrups, soaps, trail mixes, nut butters, dried fruit, laundry detergent, cooking oils, syrups, honey)
 - Leverett Coop (tea, coffee, herbs and spices, dried fruit, sweet snacks, popcorn, flour, chickpeas, nuts, couscous, rice, quinoa, barley, lentils, black beans, sugar)
 - Greenfields Market & Coop
 - Cornucopia (in Thorne's) (nuts, flours, herbs, dryer balls, and other products)
 - Mail order
- Bring your own containers
- CSAs/farmers' markets/farm stands
- Avoid prepackaging

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Food/groceries

- Buy lettuce by the head (not in plastic packaging)
- Make your own
 - Yoghurt
 - Crackers
 - Sweets
 - Bread
 - Recipes for anything can be found online!
- Bring your own take-out containers for leftovers at restaurants
- Reuse old plastic or paper bags for produce
- Recycle stretch plastics
- Grow your own! (Grow lights can be used for out-of-season produce)

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Pharmacy products

- Cosmetics, sunscreens, lotions: Make your own; buy from local low-waste producers (at farmers' markets, e.g.)
- Pill boxes: Recycle them; use them to make shakers for salt/cleaning products/what-have-you
- Toothpaste: Bite brand (and others) plastic-free toothpaste
- Toothbrushes: Choose bamboo
- Old medications: take them to the police or CVS collection sites

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Pets

- Unneeded/extra medications: ask vets and shelters if they can use them
- Cat litter: Pine shaving-based litter can be composted (DO NOT USE ON VEGETABLE GARDENS)
 - Dirty cat litter is an effective deterrent for groundhogs (pour some into their holes) and can be used to keep chipmunks away from fruit bushes—just be sure to keep it at a safe distance from the fruit
 - Litter from cats undergoing chemotherapy should not be composted
-

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Clothes

- Avoid fast fashion
- Consider materials: Are they renewable/sustainable?
 - Pesticides used to raise cotton, e.g.
 - Avoid synthetic fleece: produces microplastics
- Buy better quality
- Buy used
- Buy less—capsule wardrobes?
- Clothes swaps
- Save energy: use a clothes line instead of a dryer
- Repair
 - Paul's shoe repair (Amherst); Shu-Fix (Northampton)
 - Tailors

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Cleaning Products

- Refuse/reduce
 - Plastic containers and unnecessary water
- Buy bulk—where?
 - Cushman's: laundry sheets (no longer offering dish soap)
- Use cloth (rags, old clothes and dishcloths)
- Use natural substances
 - Natural substances that repel ants: fresh lemon juice, black pepper, boric acid, talcum powder, dish soap*
- Make your own (see next slide)

* Ruth Cullen, *The Little Green Handbook: 145 Simple Steps to Save the Planet* (White Plains, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 2008), 85.

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Cleaning Products

Cleaning product recipes (from *The Little Green Handbook*, pp. 73-74)

Glass cleaner:

¼ cup white vinegar or 1 tbsp. lemon juice + 2 cups water

Scouring powder:

Baking soda and salt, or baking soda with lemon juice or vinegar

Disinfectant spray:

½ cup eucalyptus or peppermint oil, 1 gallon water

Furniture polish:

½ cup white vinegar, 1 tsp. olive oil

Laundry softener:

¼ baking soda

Drain cleaner:

Equal parts baking soda and salt, flushed with boiling water

All-purpose cleaner:

⅛ cup borax, 1 quart hot water

Grease remover:

½ tsp. washing soda, 2 tbsp. white vinegar, ¼ tsp. liquid soap, 2 cups hot water

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Home Repair

- Let's pool our resources! Borrow (and lend) tools and equipment; draw on local expertise
- Buy used:
 - Habitat for Humanity Restores (Springfield, Pittsfield, Leominster, etc.)--sell used furniture, appliances, building materials, and more
 - EcoBuilding Bargains (Springfield)
 - Free lumber scraps at Hanshaw Lumber (Amherst)
- Donate excess materials (see the Pelham guide to [What to Do with your Stuff](#))

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Personal Grooming

- Less is more; soap is soap
- Check out packaging
 - Does soap need to come wrapped in plastic? Or even paper?
- Reduce plastic
 - Bar shampoo and conditioner
 - Toothpaste capsules (Bite brand, e.g.)
 - Compostable floss in glass containers (available on Etsy and elsewhere)
- Make your own balm (can be used as lotion, lip balm; add zinc for sunscreen)

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Kids' Stuff

- **Baby products**
 - Cloth diapers, burp cloths instead of disposables
 - Make-your-own baby food (and freeze it)
 - Assess what you really need
- **Reduce and refuse**
 - Party favors, Valentines, other give-aways: Find sustainable alternatives (or skip them)
- **Parties**
 - Use real dishes and cloth napkins (or use compostable dishes and then use them to keep weeds down in your garden!)
 - Reusable decorations (cloth, paper) or natural items (leaves, branches, flowers)
- **Toys - buy used; pass yours on (donate/sell)**
 - Hartsprings takes toys (Goodwill and Salvation Army sometimes do not)
 - Consider the materials: Look for wood, cloth, etc.
- **Ski & Skate Swaps**

What can we do? –Tips and suggestions

Travel

- Avoid flying; avoid multiple connections
- Maintain your car (tires, oil, tune-ups); avoid idling
- Bring your own
 - Cloth napkins, travel cups, silverware, water bottle, reusable bag
 - Decant shampoo, etc. into small, reusable bottles (e.g. silicone bottles)
- Hotels
 - Look for LEED certified buildings
 - Eco-hotels
- Buy locally
 - Souvenirs, food, etc.
- Resources
 - tiltedmap.com
 - myfiveacres.com

Everything else

- Technology, electronics
 - Upgrade as infrequently as possible
 - Recycle old electronics, cell phones, CDs, tapes, etc. (see “[What to Do with Your Stuff](#)”)
 - Appliances:
 - Repair if possible; get recommendations from NextDoor, neighbors, etc.
 - Donate old ones (for parts); buy used (check out Buy Nothing and other sites)
- Use technology for good!
 - Avoid waste by taking notes/pictures on your phone instead of using paper

What to do with what you already have?

- Give it away:
 - Freecycle (<https://freecycle.org/>)
 - Buy Nothing (local Facebook groups)
- Sell it:
 - Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, etc.
- Donate or recycle:

See the Pelham guide to “What to Do with Your Stuff” ([link](#))

What next? Beyond individual action

- Support businesses that are demonstrably circular in production, use, and disposal
- Advocacy
 - Raising the issue at stores
 - Pushing for legislative action
- Letter-writing campaigns
- Support public transportation, affordable housing, sustainable transportation
- Local “beyond plastics” group
- Community meetings to plan action on local sustainability issues
- Follow-up gatherings to discuss what you’ve done, what you need more support for, etc.
 - Opportunities to share tips
- How can we lead legislators at the local (MA) level?

Resources

- Books (see next slide)
- Websites
 - Zero Waste MA Facebook group
 - Judith Enck, Beyond Plastics website (www.beyondplastics.org)
- Local organizations
 - Zero Waste Amherst (<https://zerowasteamherst.wixsite.com/home>)

Books

1. Clark, Duncan & Richie Unterberger. *The Rough Guide to Shopping with a Conscience*. New York: Rough Guides, 2007. At Pelham Library (640.73 Cla).
Almost overwhelmingly thorough. It's really a guide to what kinds of issues you need to think through in making purchasing decisions if you want to engage in ethical shopping. And the issues are complex!
2. Cullen, Ruth. *The Little Green Handbook: 145 Simple Steps to Save the Planet*. White Plains, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 2008.
Very short tips and ideas for saving energy, shopping more conscientiously, etc.
3. Johnson, Bea. *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.
A lively book that includes little anecdotes along with comprehensive tips for eliminating garbage and nearly all recycling. It provides explanations of the importance of reducing waste without getting overly involved in the science.
4. Kellog, Kathryn. *101 Ways to Go Zero Waste*. New York: Countryman Press, 2019.
Covers lots of categories; includes DIY recipes for personal care and cleaning products. Concrete strategies for traveling zero-waste (e.g. a list of what to pack to avoid to-go containers).
5. Loux, Renée. *Easy Green Living: The Ultimate Guide to Simple, Eco-Friendly Choices for You and Your Home*. New York: Rodale, 2008.
Covers a lot of aspects of sustainable living, including waste reduction, but mostly avoiding toxins and non-biodegradable products. Pp. 21-34 is a section on "What Labels Really Mean" that includes information on who certifies different labels, etc.
6. Mannarino, Melanie. *The (Almost) Zero Waste Guide: 100+ Tips for Reducing Your Waste Without Changing Your Life*. New York: Tiller Press, 2020. At Pelham Library (640.28 Man).
In addition to covering the basics, there are also quite a few practical, clearly explained ideas, about, e.g., how to produce less waste when painting a room, reusing kitchen scraps, and cleaning the house without chemicals.

Books

- Coady, Theresa. *Rebuilding Earth: Designing EcoConscious Habitats for Humans*, 2020
- Pabon, John. *Sustainable for the Rest of Us: Your No Bullshit, 5-point Plan for Saving the Planet*, 2020

Kids' books

- *Zero Waste Kids: Hands-On Projects and Activities to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle* by Robin Greenfield, 2022
- *What's Waste: Trash Recycling and Protecting the Planet* by Jess French, 2019
- *Not For Me, Please* by Maria Godsey, 2018
- *Plastic Bags' Journey* by Lola Usuporva, 2023
- *Kids vs. Plastic* by National Geographic, 2020
- *Old Enough to Save the Planet* by Loli Kirby, 2021
- *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss
- *Story of the Blue Planet* by Andri Snael Magnason, 2023