

Ways to Live Without Plastics by Walt Wojcik, GROW Ecological Commissioner

Plastics were initially designed to be used and thrown away into landfills. (1) Recycling of plastics is extremely difficult as there is contamination from the many different plastics types (1, 2, 4, 5, and 7). In addition, when plastics degrade, they become non-digestible, small plastic particles (Micro- and Nano-plastics / MNPs) which enters our oceans and drinkable water systems like aquifers, rivers, and lakes. These MNPs are ingested by many living organisms including humans. So far, their deleterious effects on various organism and human life are now becoming known. One recent article identified individuals, who have MNPs in their carotid artery plaque, as having a 5 fold higher likelihood of a future stroke, heart attack or even death over a three year period, when compared to similarly matched individuals who did **not** have MNPs in their carotid artery plaque. (2)

NOW we understand that plastics, as they are, may have been a mistake. This article is a summary of the book by Sandra Ann Harris, "Say Goodbye to Plastic". (3) The below text identifies *15 ways to live without plastics* and will mainly focus on plastics in the kitchen. (Please look at the weekly Westchester e-Newsletter for how to replace plastics for the other rooms in your home.)

1. If consumers do not buy items made from or contained in plastic, manufacturers won't make item. For example, I can buy apple sauce in a glass jar and not a plastic container. If the item you buy only comes in a plastic container even from different manufactures, consider *re-thinking* the need to purchase that item. Find an appropriate replacement (e.g. I have used apple sauce to replace sugar in some recipes.)
2. **Single ply plastic bag alternative:** When shopping, bring re-usable bags to put your groceries in. Ten years ago, Mariano's sold canvas containers with handles which I still use when shopping even at other stores.
3. **Plastic baggie alternative:** Use safe, washable metal containers with silicone lids as a container when making a lunch for your school age children or for left overs. (Look at the stackable options from ECOLunchbox at <https://search.app/Lm2RRMoURpKkm2Jrk8>).
4. **Styrofoam cup/paper coffee cup/plastic water bottle alternatives:** Use reusable, washable metal (or ceramic/glass) sealed travel mugs. Ask if your barista can fill your reusable non-plastic cup when ordering your coffee.
5. **Single use straws, plastic utensils, etc. alternatives:** *Refuse* to take items from your "to go" order and replace with *reusable* glass/metal/ceramic containers with silicone lids and use your washable metal/wood utensils.
6. **Plastic trash can liner alternative:** Consider new biodegradable bioplastics which degrade best at high temperatures used at an industrial composting facility. Otherwise, reconsider using such bioplastics until more information is available on its safety to soil and ecosystems.
7. **Certain bamboo kitchen utensils** may not be recyclable or compostable because of their lacquered finish. But if finished with an organic oil, then those are okay to use and dispose of in the trash.
8. **Black plastic utensils alternative:** **Note that these utensils are known to leach forever chemicals (PFASs) that are harmful to us. If you have these, discard in trash and do not buy them anymore (4).** Rather, use metal, wood or silicone utensils.

9. Existing plastic containers in your home can be repurposed using them as non-food storage containers, potted plant containers, etc.

10. Bread in a plastic bag alternatives: Rather buy bread that comes in a paper bag (but without the cellophane window). At a bakery, ask to place bread in a paper bag or bring your own clean cloth bag (pillow case?) or waxed cotton bread bag. Store bagged bread in a metal/wood/bamboo bread box at home.

11. Tea bag alternative: Because many tea bags are made from polyethylene (PET) and nylon, you can buy tea in metal containers. Steep tea in hot water using a reusable metal infuser.

12. Alternatives for Tetra Packs (cardboard looking outside with foil lining inside) that are used for prepackaged baby food, broth, spaghetti sauces, etc.: This packaging is not recyclable. Rather buy items in glass jars or aluminum/metal cans.

13. Plastic wrap and wax paper alternatives (where the coating is a petroleum product): Instead use paper coated with beeswax or jojoba oil. Also consider using parchment paper that has a coating of silicone or aluminum foil. Used, but clean, aluminum foil is 100% recyclable.

14. Kitchen sink (plastic) sponge alternatives: Note some sponges have antibacterial Triclosan in them, but now this chemical is found to be toxic to humans and marine life. Use steel wool pads, natural loofah or a dish cloth (like your mother may have used).

15. Teflon and non-stick pots and pans alternatives: Note: the non-stick surface can leach forever chemicals (PFAs and others) that are harmful to humans. (4) Rather, one can cook with a cast iron skillet or stainless steel/ceramic/glass cooking containers, pots and pans.

References

1. The Fraud of Plastic Recycling. D. Allen et al. Center for Climate Integrity, Feb., '24.
<https://www.climateintegrity.org/plastics-fraud>

2. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2407616>

3. Sandra Ann Harris "Say Goodbye to Plastic – A survival guide for plastic-free living" Hatherleigh, 2020. Sold at Amazon for \$14.53

4. What are the health effects of PFAS? Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
<https://search.app/Dexi92Kyx9RGn9KS8>

GREEN FACT

The largest floating aggregate of plastics, called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, is 0.6 million sq. mi. in size (2x the size of Texas) and is found in the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and California. Most of the plastics are micro-plastics and not easily visible from satellites. See Wikipedia <https://search.app/wotdMTWd1mobwxEh7>

Recipe of the Month

Lentil Bolognese

Ingredients

1 ½ tablespoons olive oil
1 large onion, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon dried thyme (or use more oregano)
1 ½ teaspoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 (5.3-ounce) tube of tomato paste
1/2 cup dry red wine (optional)
3 cups vegetable broth
1 cup red lentils, soaked (see step #1)
¼ cup walnuts (or pecans), crushed finely
1 (14.5-ounce/410g) can of crushed tomatoes or whole peeled tomatoes, crushed by hand
12-16 ounces long, wide pasta (such as pappardelle or fettuccine; or pasta of your choice)
1 tablespoon high-quality balsamic vinegar
Flat-leaf Italian parsley or fresh basil, chopped or slivered (optional)

Instructions

1. Soak the 1 cup of lentils in water for 30 minutes, or up to 60 minutes. Meanwhile, prep all the other ingredients (i.e., chop the onions and garlic, chop the walnuts, etc.)
2. Heat a 12-inch deep sauté pan or Dutch oven on medium-high heat. Add the olive oil, and once it's shimmering, add the onions and season with a pinch of salt. Stir occasionally and cook the onions until a light brown fond starts to form on the surface of the pan, about 5 minutes. Add a few spoons of water to deglaze the pan, and stir. Continue cooking the onions, adding more water every few minutes and stirring frequently to prevent burning, until the onions are softened and golden brown, 9-10 minutes.
3. Add the garlic, thyme, oregano, 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt, and pepper to taste. Stir frequently and cook for 60-90 seconds.

4. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for 2-3 minutes to caramelize, stirring very frequently, until it's darker red in color.
5. Optional: If using the red wine, pour the wine into the pan and deglaze, scraping up any browned bits. Cook for 1-2 minutes, until the smell of alcohol has burned off and the mixture is jammy.
6. Pour in the broth to deglaze the pan, stirring any browned bits on the bottom of the pot and stirring the broth into the tomato paste to combine. Add the lentils and walnuts, and stir to incorporate. Heat until the mixture comes to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low to maintain a rapid simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
7. Add the crushed tomatoes and simmer for another 15-20 minutes, or until the lentils are tender but still *al dente*, stirring occasionally to prevent burning and sticking. If using crushed tomatoes, you may need to add a little water or lower the heat as needed to prevent burning. I prefer to cook for 20 minutes for a more developed flavor.
8. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil and salt generously. Add the pasta and cook until just *al dente*. Reserve a ladle or so of pasta water (may not need it). Drain the pasta but do not rinse it.
9. Taste the bolognese for seasonings, adding more salt and pepper to taste. Finish with the balsamic vinegar and stir to combine.
10. Add the hot cooked pasta to the bolognese and toss until well coated in the sauce, adding a bit of pasta water as needed to ensure the sauce coats the noodles. Garnish with chopped parsley or basil, if using.

Source: www.rainbowplantlife.com

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.

Save the Dates: Upcoming Sustainability Events!

The GROW Ecological Commission invites residents to two upcoming presentations at Village Hall focused on energy efficiency and solar opportunities:

- Tuesday, June 17 at 7:00 PM – Learn how to save energy and explore local solar options through the Community Solar Clearinghouse Solution (CS²) and other energy efficiency initiatives.
- Thursday, June 26 at 7:00 PM – Join the Citizens Utility Board at Village Hall for a presentation covering solar basics, the Switch Together group purchase program, community solar opportunities, and the Illinois Solar for All program.

Both events are free and open to all Westchester residents!