

Ocean Plastic

View Kimberly Ritchie’s exhibit [Endangered, Invasive, Undiscovered \(Species\)](#). Specifically, take a look at the section called [Invasive Species](#). Ritchie has several cyanotype pieces accompanied by her writing. One particular quote from her writing that I want to draw your attention to is this one:

“It seems that we, humans, are the invasive species. Action is needed. Nature is deteriorating under the impact of modern society. We must push to protect nature and take responsible ownership of our actions in order to change course.” –Ritchie, 2020

What do these words mean to you? What does Ritchie bring to your mind? Do you agree with her? Keep these thoughts in mind as you continue to read.

What Ocean Protection Organizations Are Saying

The following statistics have been published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature:

- Over 300 million tons of plastic are produced every year for use in a wide variety of applications.
- At least 8 million tons of plastic end up in our oceans every year, and make up 80% of all marine debris from surface waters to deep-sea sediments.
- Marine species ingest or are entangled by plastic debris, which causes severe injuries and deaths.
- Plastic pollution threatens food safety and quality, human health, coastal tourism, and contributes to climate change.
- There is an urgent need to explore the use of existing legally binding international agreements to address marine plastic pollution.
- Recycling and reuse of plastic products, and support for research and innovation to develop new products to replace single-use plastics are also necessary to prevent and reduce plastic pollution.

The following graphic describes how plastic can enter the ocean. As you can see, dumping garbage into the water or onto beaches is just one of many ways to fill our ocean with plastic and other debris. “Rain and wind can sweep debris into nearby waterbodies. ... Streams and storm drains can carry debris directly into the ocean or Great Lakes” (NOAA.gov).



The following video about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch was created by The Ocean Cleanup. By looking at the above graphic from the NOAA website, we know that plastics can enter the ocean through streams and rivers far from the seashore. One important point that The Ocean Cleanup brings up is that much of this plastic can be kept out of oceans by removing it from rivers before it even has the chance to flow out to the seacoast. (If this video does not load for you, use [this link](#) to view it on The Ocean Cleanup’s website).



2. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch -- The Ocean Cleanup

What You Can Do

At this point in time, most people know that plastic is bad for the environment. You’ve probably seen an image of a sea turtle stuck in packaging from a six-pack of soda cans, or heard about “skipping the straw,” or noticed an increase in products being marketed as eco-friendly. But how much do we all actually apply these ideas to our lives? It’s hard to notice the effects of our own habits when the consequences are so far removed from our daily lives.

A fun yet meaningful challenge for you and your friends/family to compete in is the Ocean Conservancy’s [6-Week Trash Free Challenge](#). How many points can you earn each week? Can you outperform your friends and family? Share this challenge with others for a fun and rewarding time!

Find or organize a coastal cleanup using the Ocean Conservancy’s [interactive map](#). This is another fun and rewarding activity that can be shared with family and friends. If you don’t live near the coast think about other ways to prevent trash from reaching the ocean. Remember: Cleaner rivers mean cleaner oceans down the line!

When you have plastic waste to get rid of, remember to recycle it! It’s important to do so properly. Otherwise, your “recycled” plastic waste will end up in landfills and the ocean even if you put it in your recycling bin for sanitation workers to pick up. [Earth911’s website](#) includes a search engine to help you find out where to locally recycle certain types of plastics.

Not all plastics are recyclable. Grocery bags, plastic cutlery, straws, clothing hangers, and so many more items will just be weeded out of your recycling bin and thrown in the trash pile. It's important to avoid plastic whenever possible, but especially these items!

Of course, it's best to just avoid plastic as much as possible. Some items are obvious: straws, disposable water bottles, foam take-out containers, etcetera. But some plastics are better-hidden. Microbeads are a prime example. They are often found in personal care products, such as shampoos, deodorants, makeups, and dental products. The [Plastic Soup Foundation](#) created a website that allows visitors to search for products that are made with or are free from microbeads. It's called [Beat the Microbead](#). Do you buy products that contain microbeads? If you find out that you do, what other products could you switch them out for?

Think about the more mundane changes you can make to your lifestyle. Switch to reusable grocery bags (Fun fact: They fit way more and are pretty sturdy. If you're someone like me who enjoys the challenge of bringing *all* your groceries inside in one trip, reusable bags will get you there!). If you forget reusable bags, request paper bags at checkout. Try to buy items in glass, metal, or paper containers. Buy your produce at farm stands (In some areas, buying local is cheaper! I was shocked to discover this after shopping at a farm stand in my town last year.) Find a bulk store near you. You can bring your own reusable containers to buy however much you want. This is often much cheaper than the supermarket!

I'll list some product websites that you may want to check out. Just to be clear, I am not being paid to advertise any of these products. I am simply providing a list of products and/or companies that can help consumers cut down on plastic use. Some of these I personally use in my home and absolutely love!

- [Bite Toothpaste](#) – This company started out by selling chewable toothpaste bits in refillable jars made of glass and metal. Their idea eliminated the need for plastic toothpaste tubes. Recently, they have expanded their product selection to include bamboo toothbrushes, silk floss, and mouthwash tablets, all of which come in plastic-free packaging and shipping materials! Many mainstream dental care products also include plastic in toothpaste (yes, the actual toothpaste, not just the tube!) and plastic floss (and spool, and container, and packaging around the container...).
- [CleanCult](#) – CleanCult sells household cleaning items, including dish soap, hand soap, laundry detergent, all-purpose spray, wool dryer balls (as opposed to dryer sheets made of synthetic fibers), and more. Refills come in recyclable paper cartons. This company also ships using paper materials instead of plastic packing materials.
- [Native](#) – This company does still sell products with plastic packaging, but it's starting to transition away from that. Right now, they sell deodorant that comes in 100% plastic-free packaging and ships in paper materials.
- [Package Free](#) – Package Free sells plastic-free products from a variety of companies.
- [Life Without Plastic](#) – This website also sells plastic-free products from various companies.

Lastly, as you move on with your life, keep thinking about the little things you can do to keep the earth a cleaner place. You don't need to change your lifestyle all at once. Try new things often, and find what works for you!