

Paper Towels & Napkins

Why we care

Doing away with disposable items can be a simple and cost-effective way to reduce your impact on the environment, especially when it comes to items you use every day such as paper towels and napkins. As many as 51,000 trees per day are required to replace the number of discarded paper towels. Harvesting raw materials, processing, bleaching, packaging, and shipping paper towels is about twice as energy-intensive as washing cloth items. And making paper products requires the use of bleaching chemicals, pollutes water, and adds to methane gas production after they are thrown in a landfill.

Simple, positive steps

Use washable products

- Wipe hands and clean up messes with cloth towels and rags. Hang to dry, only washing as needed.
- Use dish cloths or natural sponges to wipe counter tops.
- Use cloth napkins. Designate a napkin ring for each family member to make it easy to use napkins for more than one meal.
- Buy used cloth napkins and towels, or make your own.
- If purchasing new, select organic cotton, linen, or hemp.

Reuse

- Keep a stash of gently used paper towels, napkins, or paper bags to use for jobs like absorbing bacon grease or wiping out a greasy skillet.

Buy recycled

- If needed, buy unbleached paper towels made with post-consumer recycled content and dispose of them in your curbside compost cart. “Post-consumer” paper has been used by a consumer and then put out for recycling, as opposed to “recycled,” which may be made from factory scraps.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.