

Disposable Cups Plates and Utensils

Why we care

Americans throw away 113 billion disposable cups, 39 billion disposable eating utensils, and 29 billion disposable plates each year. The strain on landfills is obvious, but these products also consume more energy and materials than durable ones even when washing is considered. Most paper disposables have plastic liners that prevent them from being recycled. Plastic disposables do not biodegrade and may end up as part of the floating flotsam in the ocean that kills wildlife. Even bioplastic causes problems: It's a contaminant in plastic recycling streams, does not break down in home composting systems, and may be unsuitable for commercial composting facilities.

Simple, positive change

- Make an Earth Day commitment to carry a reusable mug. If 50 customers a day in every U.S. Starbucks did this, the equivalent of almost 300,000 trees a year would be saved.
- If you forget your mug, ask for a ceramic mug for in-store orders and forgo the plastic lid for to-go use.
- Carry your own containers and utensils for take-out meals. Check www.ReusableBags.com.
- If you are serving a large crowd:
 - Ask guests to bring their own tableware.
 - Borrow extra from a neighbor or guest.
 - Rent supplies from a rental shop.
- Have lightweight, washable tableware set aside for picnics and potlucks.
- Be proactive in your work place, school, church, or other organization. Work places can buy washable tableware for lunches. A number of schools in Portland have held silverware drives to replace disposables.

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