

Eugene Friends Meeting Plastics-Free Challenge 2023:

Thanks for joining the Plastic Free Challenge, a weekly calendar to suggest ways to fast from plastics. Because Quakers don't traditionally observe Lent, feel free to use this challenge in any way you want, perhaps as a pilgrimage to Earth Day.

Each Saturday, look for an attachment to the weekly with the plastic-free focus for the week, and tips for avoiding plastics in that area. **We will focus on single-use plastics, those things that are designed to be used once, then tossed.**

We will not give much attention to recycling and re-use, though these are good steps. Research estimates that only 10% of our plastic waste is actually recycled, and, while re-using a single-use plastic item will stretch it's usefulness, it is still another piece of plastic that will eventually go to the landfill.

The calendar-

Week 1: Prepare and begin to fast

Week 2: Food shopping

Week 3: Your kitchen

Week 4: Clothing and laundry

Week 5: Your bathroom

Week 6: Celebrations, travel, and eating out

Week 7: The garden

Also, you might want to join the Eugene Friends Meeting Earthcare Support Group at our next meeting: Monday, March 6, at 7 p.m. We spend a bit of time discussing plastics and alternatives we've found. Just drop us an email and we'll send the zoom link.

Let us know if you have any questions, and *happy plastic fasting!*
Eugene Friends Meeting Earthcare Support Group,
earthcare@eugenefriendsmeeting.org

Week 1: Prepare and begin to fast

1. Meditate on the reasons for a plastic fast: Plastic is not biodegradable; no existing bacteria can break down plastic, so it cannot biodegrade like other organic materials. Instead it *photodegrades*: When plastics are exposed to the sun's ultraviolet radiation for a long time, the polyethylene material becomes brittle and begins to crack, breaking into many tiny pieces. This process is estimated to take between 500 and 1000 years, but even when plastic breaks into smaller fragments it remains non-biodegradable and toxic for animals and humans.

Thousands of animals die every year from swallowing or choking on plastic items, or eating microplastics instead of food. *So why do we continue to use disposable plastics, which will then become a problem for creatures and the Earth for hundreds of years?*

2. Become mindful: In the days leading up to Ash Wednesday (February 22), take notice of the single-use plastic in your life. Perhaps keep a list on your refrigerator of any new plastics that enter your home: Plastic bread bags, yogurt containers, coffee cup lids, pill bottles, etc.

Another way to become mindful is to collect all your plastic waste in one place, and notice what accumulates. What are the sources of plastic waste that are produced by your particular way of living? This is not about feeling bad, but rather about noticing and being honest.

Or check out this plastic pollution calculator at Earthday.org

3. NPYM's Faith and Practice says, *"We grieve over what has been lost through humankind's continuing misuse of divine gifts, leading to extinction of species; pollution of earth, water, and air; and calamitous climate change. As Friends we are led to live in right relationship to creation, to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants, to educate ourselves, and to witness both personally and as a Quaker community."*

Queries: *What are you led to do about the plastic crisis? How will you educate yourself? How can you be a witness for creation?*

4. Reflect and make a commitment: After observing your habits, make time to reflect on what your specific commitment will be. You're encouraged to stretch yourself in a way that is challenging and requires intention, but this is meant to be a journey of learning and transformation, not perfection! If fasting from all single-use plastics seems out of reach, you could choose to refrain from specific plastics only. Plastics will not disappear overnight.; you should choose the actions which best fit your lifestyle.

Also, you may have to make some agreements with others in your household; if you are avoiding plastics but others are bringing plastics in at the same rate as usual, you may experience some difficult feelings. Make a plan for how you will handle that.

5. Make your own zero-waste shopping kit: We all know to take our own reusable cloth bags when shopping, but how can we replace those low-density polyethylene plastic bags we use for produce? (A single-use plastic bag takes 100 years to break down into micro-plastics.)

One solution: Add a handful of small paper bags to your cloth shopping bag, as part of a zero waste kit. Or carry reusable cloth or mesh produce bags with you. You can order a set today, or make your own [drawstring cloth bags](#). Make sure you know their tare weight (ask the clerk to write it on your bag).

6. Educate yourself: Read from some of these sites - [Plastic Oceans](#), [Earth Day.org](#), [NPR.org](#).

7. Raise Your Voice : Talk to your friends and community members; ask them how they're reducing their use of plastic. Ask people in your workplace and social media groups how they're dealing with plastics. Are they receptive to hearing about some of the things you're doing or planning to do? In combatting the plastic crisis, our collective action is far more effective than changes in our individual lives.