

Week 7: The Garden and Pets

Researchers say that [more microplastics are getting into farm soil than oceans](#); and it's showing up in our fruits, veggies, and bodies. Microplastics arrive on farms through processed sewage sludge used for fertilizer, plastic mulches, plastic covering greenhouses, and are even intentionally added as slow-release fertilizers and protective seed coatings. Solutions to plastic abuse by agribusiness include supporting small organic farmers, and growing our own vegetables in a sustainable way.

1. First and foremost, reduce your purchase of flimsy plastic seedling pots and six-packs.

Plastic pots are the popular commercial plant containers because they are cheap to make; reduce the number of new plastic pots you buy by reusing the pots you already have to plant seeds yourself. Or buy used pots from BRING recycling; or use peat pots, or [compostable pots made of cow dung](#) for your starts. (The cow dung pots should be used in an outdoor greenhouse or cold frame only.) Or use containers you have around the house, such as toilet paper tubes, or even small paper bag. (Some plant nurseries also accept old plastic pots for reusing and recycling.)

Another option is to ask friends and neighbors to divide plants to propagate in your own yard. Or try [growing plants from cuttings](#)! Many herbs and some veggies can be rooted in a jar of water.

2. Seek alternatives to plastic bags full of compost and amendments. You can find many organic amendments in cardboard boxes. Or go to a place that sells bulk soil and amendments - you don't have to buy a truck load; most places will sell by the bucket. You can also "make" mulch and soil yourself, with compost, leaves, shredded paper, and cardboard, or [make a hugelkultur bed](#) - allow brush and branches to compost in place for a super fertile, moisture-retaining garden bed. You can also make your own potting soil mix to avoid plastic bags of the stuff. ([This article](#) has a thorough discussion of how to make your own potting mix, as well as other seed-starting advise.)

3. DIY pest control: Instead of spending a small fortune on plastic bottles of pest repellents, [make your own at home](#). Also think about using [companion planting](#) and introducing [beneficial insects](#).

4. Reduce microplastics in your soil: Plastic sheets used to suppress weeds, warm the soil, and retain moisture, are challenging to recycle and costly to dispose of, so they are often left to break down in the soil. Some biodegradable and widely available alternatives to landscape fabric and plastic sheets for mulching are sheets of cardboard, pieces of burlap, or old newspapers.

5. Plastic free pet care: Rather than picking up dog poo using a single-use plastic bag, try using a shovel and putting it straight in the bin. For transporting waste on a walk, paper bags are the top option, with 100% compostable or biodegradable bags as a close second. Or see [how to make newspaper dog poo bags](#)! Also, buy [pet shampoo in a bar](#)!

6. Remember Peace and Equality: Plastics are not a strictly environmental issue; they also have [significant impacts on human rights](#). The oil and gas used to produce plastics contribute to the climate crisis, and microplastics threaten communities' food security, drinking water, and health. And also remember: [The US military spends 81\\$billion a year defending global oil supplies](#).

Queries: *Do we live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all war? In what ways do we take part in war indirectly? What will the impact of our current choices be on the lives of people in marginalized communities, and on future generations?*

7. Celebrate! Look back at what you have accomplished. Celebrate the changes you've made, and resolve to become even more intentional in your purchases. Manufacturers and retailers are increasingly responsive to our demand for new plastic-free options. Consequently, some of our plastics issues may be easier to resolve six months from now.