

MY PLASTIC FREE WEEK



Staff photos by E.J. Harris

Kathy and Bill Aney tried to go plastic free for a week to help reduce plastic usage.

Half of plastic produced each year only used once

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There’s a famous exchange in the 1967 movie “The Graduate” between recently graduated Benjamin Braddock and family friend, Mr. McGuire:

Mr. McGuire: I want to say one word to you. Just one word.

Benjamin: Yes, sir.

Mr. McGuire: Are you listening?

Benjamin: Yes, I am.

Mr. McGuire: Plastics.

Benjamin: Exactly how do you mean?

Mr. McGuire: There’s a great future in plastics. Think about it. Will you think about it?

Mr. McGuire was right. The plastics industry exploded over the next several decades. Plastic is now everywhere and in just about everything. Discarded plastic, which takes 500 to 1,000 years to biodegrade, is piling up.

Everyone is thinking about plastic now.

About six months ago, a sign appeared at the Pendleton Sanitary Service recycling center. It read, “Plastic is no longer recyclable. Please dispose of all plastic with your household trash.” The move came in response to China’s announcement that it would no longer accept the world’s plastic waste. The PSS website elaborated. “This is a national and international issue, but the effects are very local. There are no markets to absorb what China has refused to accept.”

An idea floated to the surface of my mind about that time. I considered attempting to live for an entire week without plastic as an overture to ejecting plastic from my life. The notion seemed formidable and maybe downright impossible.

There was plenty of motivation. According to Plastic Oceans, the typical plastic bag is used for 15 minutes before being discarded. Half of the 300 million tons of plastic produced each year is only used once. An organization called Straws Suck reports that Americans use 500 million plastic straws every day. There’s a plastic island off California’s coast that is twice the size of Texas.

Chunks of plastic, and also tiny pieces called micro fragments, float in our oceans and harm aquatic animals. This month, a pilot whale died in Thailand after ingesting more than 80 plastic bags.

My mom schooled me and my four siblings to be serious recyclers. She sought to reduce our family footprint and recycling felt natural to us. My husband Bill’s family ethos was similar. As adults,



The Aneys also started using plastic-free dishwasher and laundry soap pods from Dropps.

PLASTIC BY THE NUMBERS

300 million tons - amount of plastic produced annually

40 - percentage of plastic created for packaging

15 minutes - lifespan of a typical plastic bag

500 to 1,000 years - time it takes plastic to degrade

185 pounds - amount of plastic thrown away by the average American

Twice the size of Texas - size of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch off the coast of California

One million - number of sea birds killed annually from plastic

14 - percent of plastic recycled worldwide

EcoWatch statistics



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