

# Plastic Free July



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Every July, millions worldwide participate in Plastic Free July, an initiative encouraging individuals, corporations, and governments to reduce their reliance on single-use plastic items. Launched by the Plastic Free Foundation in Australia in 2011, this campaign has grown into a global movement aimed at reducing plastic waste; it's not just about refusing plastic straws, it's about making lasting changes to protect marine life, wildlife, and the environment.

Plastic pollution is a significant environmental issue. According to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, over 380 million tons of plastic are produced annually, but only 9% is recycled, with the rest ending up in landfills or polluting oceans. Plastic does not biodegrade; it breaks down into micro-plastics, which have been found in food and water. Plastic Free July raises awareness and encourages action; empowering individuals to make conscious decisions that reduce their environmental impact.

In New Jersey, legislation is paving the way for an eco-friendly future. Since November 4, 2021, food service businesses can only provide single-use plastic straws upon request and must keep an ample supply. Stores can still sell packages of single-use plastic straws and pre-packaged beverage straws. On May 4, 2022, New Jersey enacted one of the strictest plastic bans in the U.S., prohibiting retail stores, supermarkets, and dining establishments from providing or selling single-use plastic bags or foam food service products. Single-use paper

carryout bags are allowed, except by grocery stores over 2,500 square feet, which can only offer reusable carryout bags.

Transitioning away from plastic can be daunting, but small, steady steps make a difference. Here are some effective tips to contribute:

- **Refuse single-use plastic items:** Avoid using plastic straws, utensils, and cups when eating out. Bring your own reusable shopping bags, water bottles, and mugs.
- **Shop sensibly:** Buy in bulk to reduce packaging waste. Choose items packaged in glass, cardboard, or aluminum, instead of plastic. Visit local farmers' markets for fresh, mostly unpacked produce.
- **Make eco-friendly replacements:** Switch to bar soaps instead of body wash in plastic bottles. Use aluminum foil, glass containers, reusable food storage bags, or stainless-steel food containers for storing food.
- **Be a mindful consumer:** Support local establishments or favorite brands committed to sustainability and plastic-free packaging.
- **Educate and promote:** Share your insights with friends, family, and colleagues. Participate in local cleanups or plastic reduction events.