



Reading time: 4 mins

# Whatever Happened to Plastic-Free?



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

DEC 5, 2022 [plastic pollution](#), [single-use plastic](#)



In the 20-teens, the plastic-free lifestyle was getting almost as much attention as the [Whip Nae Nae](#). But blogs and articles featuring smiling urbanites with tiny jars containing a year's worth of plastic waste seem to have disappeared. Was plastic-free just another pop culture fad? Did plastic win? Whatever happened to plastic-free?

*This article contains affiliate links. If you make a purchase through one of these links, we receive a small commission that helps fund our [Recycling Directory](#).*

## Plastic Pollution

Unlike many trends from the decade that [left no lasting impression](#), plastic-free living was an attempt to do something important. Plastic is a key player in two of the biggest environmental crises facing the world today: climate change and global pollution. Plastic is responsible for between [4% and 8%](#) of global oil consumption. Plastics production in the U.S. generates [232 million metric tons](#) of greenhouse gases every year. Plastic products are often [used only once](#) and then discarded. Plastics incineration in the U.S. accounts for [5.9 million metric tons](#) of [CO2-eq](#), primarily in areas near impoverished communities and

### What Do You Think?

**Are you considering moving because of climate change?**

- No
- Yes
- I'm researching my options to decide

NEXT \*

\* By clicking "NEXT" you agree to the following: We use cookies to collect your survey answers. If you would like to continue with this survey, please read and agree to the [CivicScience Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

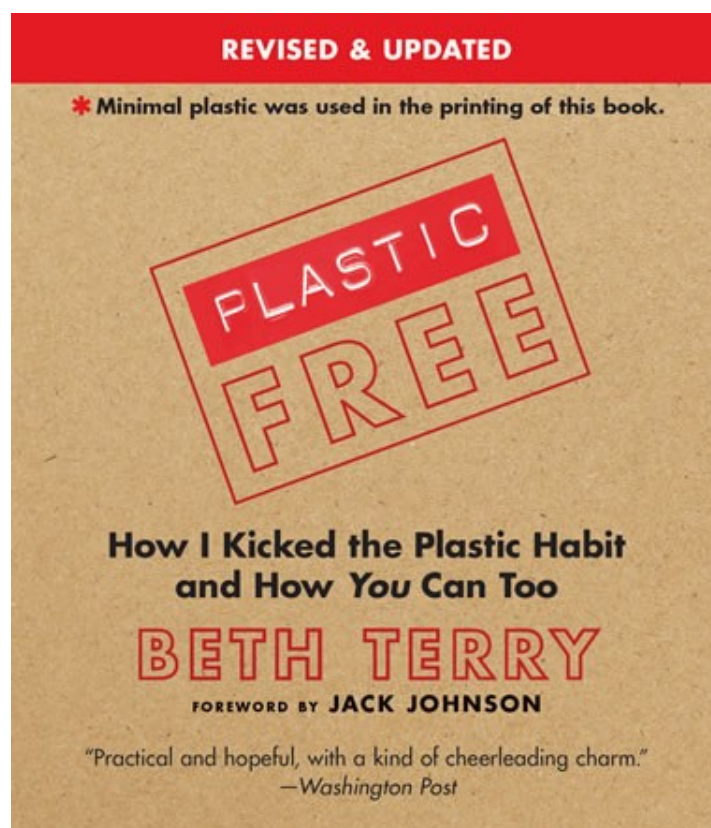
---

communities of color. Outside of the U.S., plastic is often burned in the open, where it [releases poisonous chemicals](#) with a global warming potential 5,000 times higher than carbon.

[Eight million tons](#) of plastic makes its way to marine ecosystems each year, where it forms massive [garbage gyres](#) and wreaks [environmental havoc](#). Plastic does not biodegrade, but sunlight and heat do cause it to [release greenhouse gases](#) as it breaks down into [microscopic particles](#) that enter the food chain and bioaccumulate. The average person ingests about [5 grams of microplastics](#) per week (about as much plastic as a credit card) through food, water, and even the air we breathe. No one knows what the long-term impacts on human health will be from ingesting so much plastic.

## Plastic-Free

Clearly, we need to work towards a [post-plastic world](#). And in the teens, it seemed like people were starting to do it. Beth Terry is credited with starting the Plastic-Free movement. Inspired by a photo of a sea bird killed by eating plastic, Terry set out to eliminate her personal plastic use. She documented her progress on the blog, [My Plastic Free Life](#). In 2012, she published the book [Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too](#) and updated it in 2015 – the same year she [gave an interview](#) to Earth911.



Unlike the fairly simple switch of sorting recycling, going plastic-free requires lifestyle changes both big and small. Even so, many serious environmentalists were inspired by Terry's project and took on the challenge themselves. [Earth911 profiled people](#) living plastic-free in 2016; The New York Times [published a story](#) featuring several more in 2019. Like Terry, many of them kept blogs. But a search for "plastic free life" today brings up Terry's website (which was last updated in 2019) and not much else. What happened?

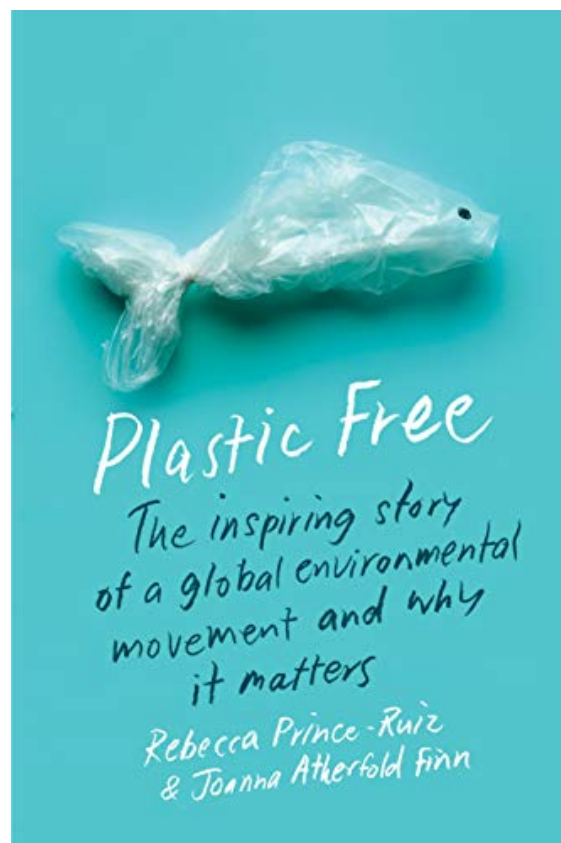
## Plastic-Free July

It may not be surprising that the movement didn't gain widespread popularity. Despite some gains in [plastic-free packaging](#), and even [retailers](#) specializing in plastic-free products, for many people, plastic-free living simply [isn't realistic](#). If you need to take medicine, your prescription will come in plastic; if you [have children](#), you will inevitably accumulate some plastic toys.

But that doesn't mean that people have given in to the ever-growing wave of plastic. Founded in 2011, the [Plastic Free Foundation](#) in Australia created the Plastic Free July challenge. As a month-long challenge that focuses on single-

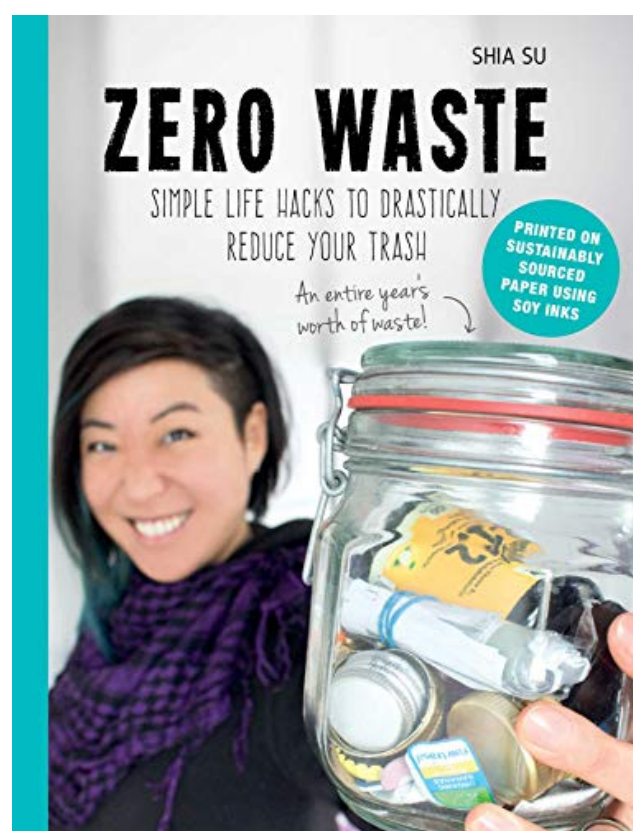


use plastics, [Plastic Free July](#) is more achievable than a total lifestyle change. Encouraging a [good, better, best](#) approach, the point of the challenge is not perfection but improvement. Because changes made for a month are [likely to stick](#), completing a Plastic Free challenge is a good way to reduce your overall plastic waste year-round. [Plastic Free: The Inspiring Story of a Global Environmental Movement and Why It Matters](#) relates the history of the challenge and shares lessons from its success.

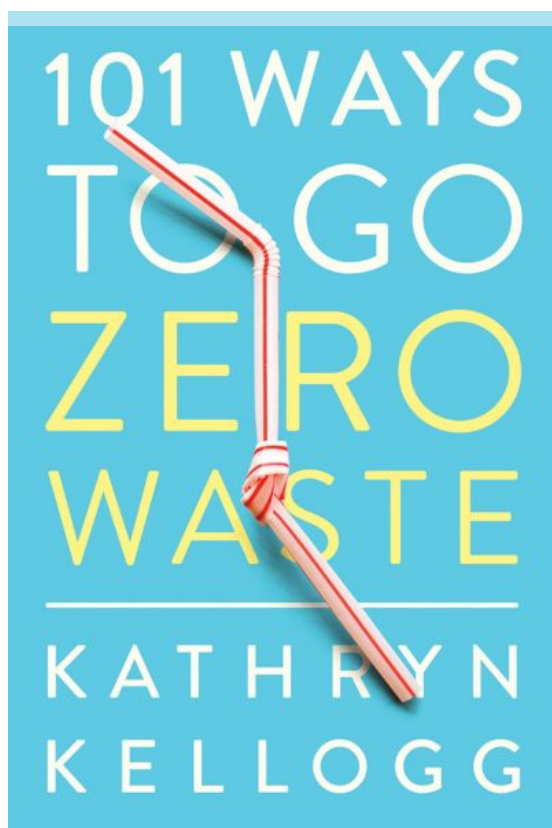


## Zero Waste

But for environmentalists who are serious about eliminating plastic, there are still some resources. Plastic waste – especially the waste that ends up polluting waterways – is [predominantly packaging](#) waste. So efforts to eliminate plastic waste overlap almost perfectly with the [Zero Waste](#) movement. Zero Waste doesn't necessarily mean "zero garbage." But it does seek to eliminate the wastefulness that leads to large amounts of garbage – especially plastic waste.



Today there are many websites like [Zero Waste Memoirs](#) and books like Shia Su's [Zero Waste: Simple Life Hacks to Drastically Reduce Your Trash](#) that provide the same kind of personal journey stories combined with practical tips that plastic-free websites once did. Many of them refer to Kathryn Kellogg's website [Going Zero Waste](#) and book [101 Ways to Go Zero Waste](#) as their own inspiration.



Whether you frame your goal as plastic-free or zero waste in the '20s really isn't very important. What does matter is reducing your plastic consumption wherever you can. Start with [simple changes](#) like finding alternatives for the single-use plastics that [you use the most](#).

advertising



[Reading time: 4 mins](#)

## [What You Need To Know About Coal Power](#)



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

### Related Post

Earth Watch

#### What You Need To Know About Coal

Dec 5, 2022 Gemma

Alexander

Home & Garden

Inspire & Motivate

#### 5 Alternative Christmas Tree Ideas

Dec 5, 2022 Earth911

Inspire & Motivate

Living & Well-Being

#### Earth Action: Cancel Catalogs

Dec 2, 2022 Gemma

Alexander

Earth911 is a universal resource that helps you find your own shade of green.

We educate and inform consumers, businesses and communities to inspire thought and facilitate earth-positive

**Join 135,000+ Earthlings**

Type your email address

ADVERTISE WITH US

Audience

Products

Partners