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How & Buy Inspire & Motivate

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# Earth Action: Shop the Bulk Bins



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

© JAN 27, 2023 [bulk bins](#), [Food Packaging](#)



Earth911 is honoring the 52 years of Earth Day with 52 [Actions for the Earth](#). Each week through Earth Day 2023, we will share an action you can take to [invest in the Earth](#) and make your own life more sustainable. Containers and packaging make up nearly a third of municipal solid waste, and a lot of that third comes from food packaging. This week, you can take action for the Earth by shopping the bulk bins at your grocery store.

## Action: Shop the Bulk Bins

### Food Packaging

Although it's hard to find reliable statistics on how much packaging waste is specific to food, there's no question that it's a significant portion. Plastic, glass, aluminum, and paper are all used to package food; in many cases, all in the same products. Each of these materials consumes water, energy, and chemicals to produce. Most [food packaging](#) is designed to be single use, and a lot of it is

### What Do You Think?

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

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

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[not recyclable](#) or [hard to recycle](#). Unrecycled [plastic](#) <sup>CLOSE</sup>:[kaging](#) contributes to [plastic pollution](#) and leaches chemicals. Food packaging has a huge [environmental footprint](#).

## Bulk Buys

While scientists pursue possible solutions like [bioplastics](#) and [edible packaging](#), consumers can reduce their food packaging waste by simply buying less packaged food. When you've already eliminated as many prepared foods from your grocery list as you can, you can further cut down on packaging by buying your staples in bulk. Buying food in bulk is a good way to eliminate [food waste](#) at the same time as packaging waste (and it can save money too). But it does take some effort and there is a learning curve if you haven't shopped the bulk bins before.

## Bulk Bins

Many a well-meaning shopper has arrived in the bulk aisle empty-handed. Most stores will have empty containers for sale. But they are usually either made of the plastic you're trying to avoid or are overpriced Instagram-ready containers that might not be entirely practical. The first time you buy something in bulk, it can be confusing to figure out how to weigh and label your purchases so that you pay the right amount at the register. Rather than making a complete switch to bulk staples, which can be expensive and result in a collection of containers that don't really work in your cabinets, it might be easier to make a gradual shift.

This week, pick one staple item to buy in bulk. Choosing something like pasta might be easier than potentially messy items like flour or olive oil. But you could also just choose whatever you are currently out of. Before you head to the grocery store, find or buy a right-sized container. That means one that fits on your shelves and also holds a realistic amount of the food that won't go bad before you use it up or run out before the end of the week. Put a blank label on the container and place it in your reusable shopping bag to bring with you when you go to the store. At the store, remember to get the [tare weight](#) of your container before you fill it up. Get the item number off the bulk bin and write it on your label before you head to the register.

Once you're used to the routine of packing a container and know how to find and use the scales and labels at your grocery store, it's easy to add more items to your bulk shopping list. Eventually, you might discover that you don't even need to visit the packaged foods aisles in the grocery store.

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