

Waste-Free Lunches

Why we care

Convenience produces waste like disposable wrappings, bags, containers, utensils, straws, and napkins. Prepackaged lunches are everywhere, and we use them a lot. The US consumes more than 380 billion plastic bags, sacks, and wraps each year, and billions of juice boxes and pouches end up in landfills. Lunchtime trash is often the largest source of trash in schools. Avoiding disposables saves precious natural resources and money. A waste-free lunch costs about two-thirds that of a lunch packed in disposables.

Simple, positive change

Packing Lunches

- Replace traditional brown bags with a reusable bag or a lunch box. See “Lunch Packing” at www.reuseit.com.
- Use reusable bags, wraps, or containers with lids in lieu of plastic bags.
- Use a washable bottle, jar, or a thermos for beverages.
- Pack a cloth napkin and carry washable utensils.
- Avoid single-serving items like yogurt, apple sauce, and granola bars.
- Ask kids to leave uneaten food in the lunch box to be eaten or composted later.
- Don’t use plastic containers in the microwave. The heat can cause chemicals to leach into your food.

Buying Lunch To-Go

- Carry your own reusable lunch container, utensils, and napkin.
- Join Go Box, www.goboxpdx.com, a service for durable containers for food cart lunches in downtown Portland.

Bringing About Change

- If your child’s school does not already promote waste-free lunches, start one! See www.epa.gov/students/pack-waste-free-lunch
- If your favorite food cart, to-go restaurant, or cafeteria downtown doesn’t participate in Go Box, ask them to do so.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.