



Waste Less At Home

A Room by Room Guide to Incorporating
Sustainability Into Your Life





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Introduction

For many of us, our homes are everything. It's where we relax and unwind, eat and spend time with our families, where we work and play, celebrate and make memories. A place to live and grow.

We all have a list of ways we'd like our current (or future) homes to be better. Whether it's a big home improvement project or small tweaks, tasks and reminders, we're always working to make our home life simpler, safer and more special.

As we continue to spend more time in our homes than ever before, it's worth considering ways we can waste less and make our homes more sustainable. In wanting to limit the negative impacts we have on the larger world and express our commitment to a thriving planet and community, there is no better time than the present.

From finding ways to curb your food waste to discovering opportunities to conserve energy and more, we created this guide as a starting point for making a conscious effort to waste less at home. Organized by room with a handy checklist of tips, you can explore and execute simple fixes to live more sustainably and be less wasteful. And if you're the printing type, you can access low-ink versions of our checklists in the appendix beginning on page 22.

Whether it's your first time implementing low-waste tactics or you're a seasoned veteran of the zero-waste lifestyle, we're thrilled to have you join us on this journey!



Sustainable Steps for the Whole Home

Whether you're looking to tackle waste in a specific room or aiming to address the whole house, these tips are great starting points and reminders for any lower waste journey.

Use What You Have and Only Swap or Upgrade When Necessary

Throughout this guide we offer advice on many ways to waste less, including tips around investing in more sustainable products or items. While it's great to consider more sustainable options before making a purchase, no matter what you're buying, it's also important to use what you have before buying new. From your household cleaner to your couch to your cell phone, being mindful of what you have and using it to the fullest is an important step in being less wasteful at home.

Sustainable Cleaning Products & Practices

Let's face it: sometimes it feels like we're cleaning our homes more than we're actually living in them. Regardless of the frequency with which you clean, it's important to recognize the various ways you can level up your cleaning game.

Natural and sustainably-made cleaning products are growing in popularity as people worldwide are looking to end their reliance on synthetic chemical cleaners and avoid concerns around those products' production, biodegradability and potential health risks. When looking at cleaners, be sure to check the labels to review ingredients and sustainability promises, while also assessing your needs for *cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing.*



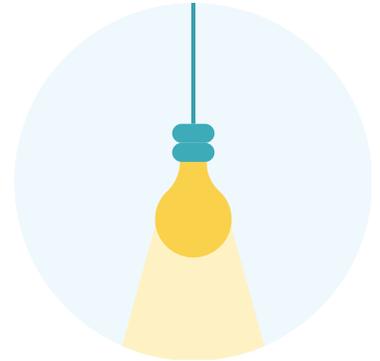
Perhaps the simplest way to reduce waste is to opt for refills or concentrates that you can mix on your own and fill your existing spray bottles, rather than buying a new spray bottle when you run out. Doing so helps reduce added plastic waste and keeps your house shiny and clean.

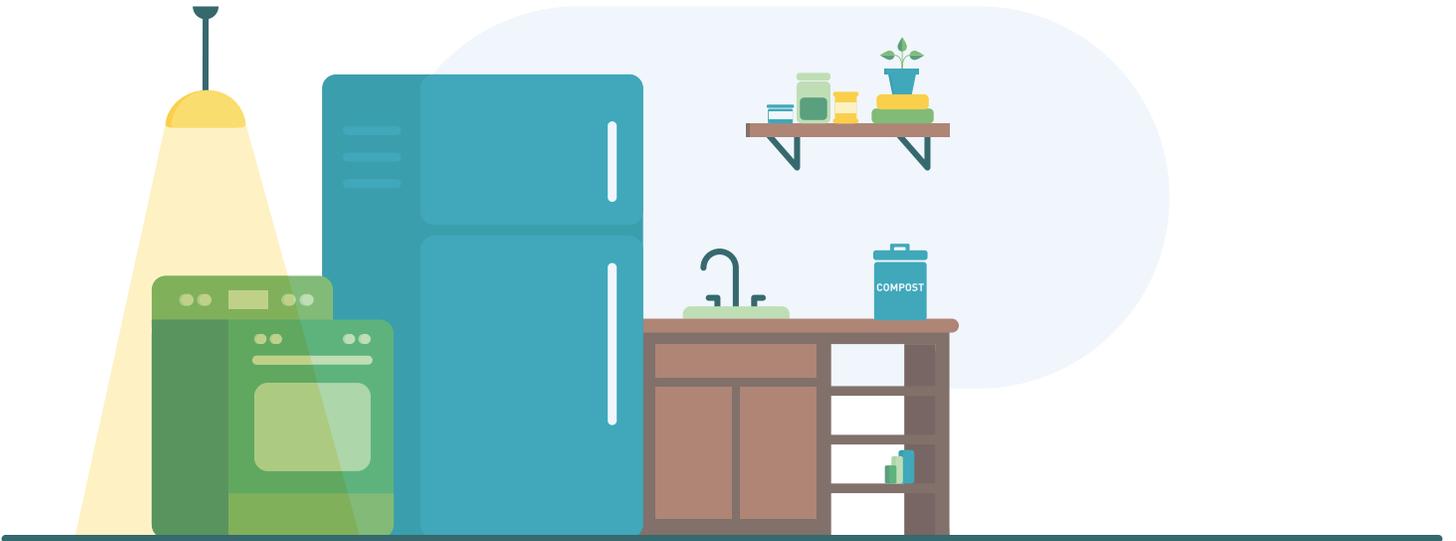
Want to be even more sustainable? You can make your own all-natural household cleaner using things you might have in your kitchen! One of our favorite self-made cleaner recipes involves using [*citrus peels and vinegar*](#) for whole-home freshness.

Energy-Efficient Lighting

One of the most common recommendations from energy experts and sustainability lovers alike comes down to implementing more energy-efficient lighting throughout your home, most notably in the form of LED light bulbs. Though it may not be the most exciting of sustainability hacks, it's definitely one that carries a big impact.

The [*benefits of LED bulbs*](#) have been known for decades, using anywhere from 25% to 80% less energy and lasting up to 25x longer than traditional incandescent bulbs. Less energy usage and a longer life span equals a smaller environmental footprint and less waste (not to mention the added savings in your wallet!).





Kitchen & Dining Room

The kitchen and dining room are the rooms where some of our more wasteful practices occur. Food waste is a huge issue globally, with roughly [*27 million tons of food wasted in our homes annually*](#) according to ReFED. At Sustainable America, we've focused extensively on ways to reduce our household food waste, from our [*I Value Food initiative*](#) and [*food waste challenge*](#) to tips on storing, utilizing and even growing your own food.

Whether food waste is the main priority or you're opting for other sustainable actions, our kitchens and dining rooms are the best place to start when looking to be less wasteful.

Get Creative with Your Leftovers

Whether you're an expert at eating all your leftovers or still struggle to finish every last bite, addressing the leftover problem is one of the biggest ways to combat food waste. For lonely veggies and scraps from your nightly meal, you can [*repurpose or save them for later*](#), while larger leftover portions can be [*remixed into new recipes*](#). Conducting a [*food waste audit*](#) is a great way to review what you regularly use or eat up and help tweak your portion sizes to avoid excess waste. For others, [*meal-planning services like Ends + Stems*](#) can help you plan weekly menus featuring "interlocking" ingredients to avoid having excess ingredients that go to waste or leftovers that can't be repurposed into something else.

Skip the Paper Towels and Napkins and Go Washable

One of the most impactful sustainability decisions you can make in your kitchen and dining room is to nix disposable paper products and opt for a collection of cloths, rags and towels for all your kitchen and dining cleanup needs. Even though many paper towels and napkins are made from recycled paper, these products themselves can not be recycled as their fibers are too thin and fine to be used again. So unless you carefully select and compost your paper products, every paper towel or napkin is destined for the landfill. By using a variety of washable and reusable towels, you can ensure you always have a clean one handy for whatever the situation calls for!

Not-so-fun-fact:

Paper towels and napkins are NOT recyclable and end up going directly to the landfill. That's why opting for washable is so important!



Kitchen & Dining Room Checklist

- Get creative with your leftovers
 - [Save and freeze veggie scraps](#) in a sealable bag or container and use to make homemade broth
 - [Remix existing sides or ingredients](#) into new meals or recipes (add potatoes or peppers to eggs; use salad green leftovers on sandwiches)
- Tackle food waste in your home
 - Conduct a food waste audit to assess how you eat and waste food
 - Create a weekly meal plan
- Use cloth towels and napkins instead of disposable (and non-recyclable) paper products
- Fill your sink with soap and water to hand-wash instead of letting the faucet run
- Invest in reusable, quality food storage containers like silicone zip-top or glass containers
 - Depending on what was stored, you can even wash & reuse lightly-worn disposable plastic zip-top bags
- Grow your own herbs on the countertop to avoid buying too much
- Sharpen your knives (at home or bring to a professional) rather than buying new ones

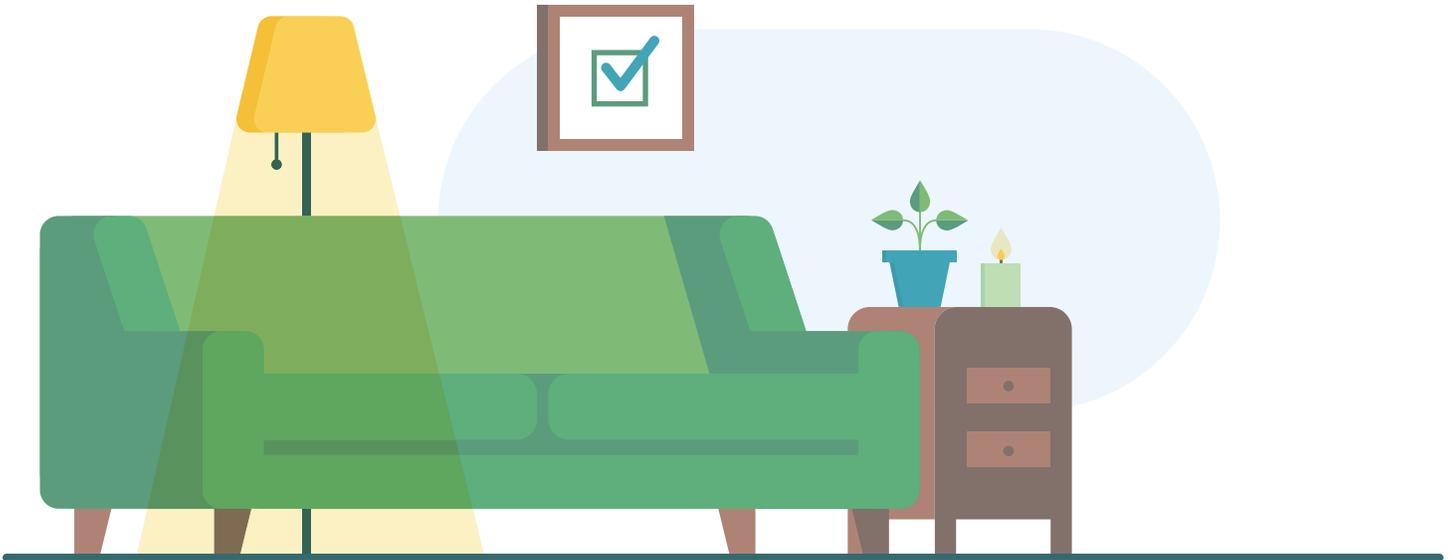
Consider This - Ideas for Super Sustainers

- Try Composting!
 - Begin a compost bin inside (read our [tips](#) & [info](#) about composting)
 - Have a larger compost pile or area outside and use with your garden
 - Explore composting programs in your area (if applicable)



Save Ink & Cross It Off!

Access a printer-friendly version of this checklist on page 22



Living Room, Family Room & Den

For many, the living room spaces are the heart of the home, places where we come together to connect, converse, unwind or have fun. Since these spaces are so important to us, they represent a huge opportunity to think and act sustainably — regardless of scale or household size.

Give the Well-Loved Couch New Life

One of the most important parts of our living spaces is the furniture we fill it with. It needs to be comfortable, functional and fit our style, otherwise we'll be craving something new. Rather than putting older furniture on the curb and going shopping, find ways to refresh, renew or reuse it within your own home. Maybe it's reupholstering the fabric to alleviate wear and tear, or refilling the cushions to make it comfortable. It could even be as simple as moving it to another room or getting a cover for it. Remember that we don't always need new or trending furniture to be happy and reducing the desire to buy new is an important step in building a lower-waste and more sustainable home.

**We don't always
need new or trending
furniture to be happy!**



Living Room, Family Room & Den Checklist

- Winter Tip: Set your thermostat to a lower temperature to save energy
 - Add extra blankets to keep warm
 - Ensure storm windows and other windows are locked to prevent drafts
 - Use window wrap to keep warm air indoors

- Reupholster, re-cushion or repurpose old chairs and couches instead of tossing them

- Unplug electronics when not in use, or use power strips with easily accessible on/off switches for those used infrequently

- Use rechargeable batteries instead of disposables for remotes, controllers and other devices

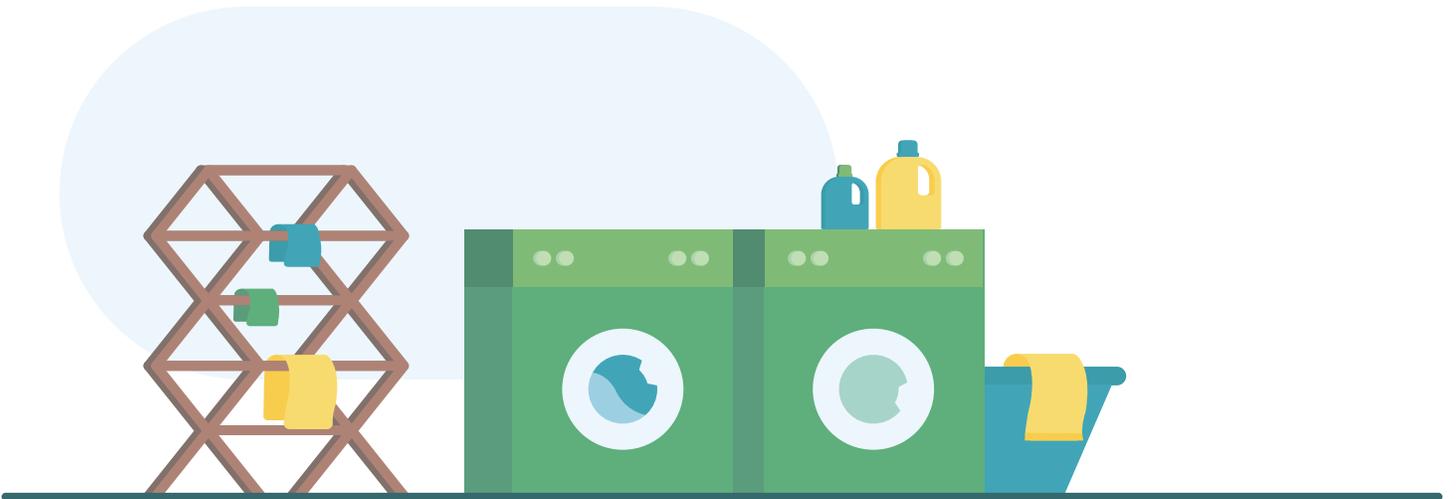
- Enable energy-saver, auto-off and low-power modes to conserve electricity

- Save candle jars to refill with homemade candle wax, house plants or store small objects



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Laundry Room

The laundry room is where some of our most repetitive tasks occur. Within all that repetition lies the risk of being more wasteful as we operate on auto-pilot. From how we wash and dry to the different products we use, there are plenty of opportunities to make one of our most common chores less wasteful.

Keep It Cold

Sorting colors and whites, washing like fabrics, the “towel-only” load. There are plenty of adages around laundry, but the biggest one to avoid if you’re hoping to be less wasteful at home centers around using warm or hot water. Studies show that washing laundry in cold water is *just as effective* as a hot water wash. Not only that, but cold water uses approximately 1/10th the amount of energy as hot water and helps your clothes last longer.

Check Your Labels & Clothe Yourself Sustainably

At some point we’ve all had to check the labels on our clothing to review the washing instructions. But even more important than the washing tips on the tag is the list of materials and fibers your item is made of. Many modern garments, including those made using fast fashion practices, *contain synthetic textiles* like nylon, rayon, and polyester made using wasteful production practices or with fibers containing microplastics. You don’t need to purge your entire closet (that would be even more wasteful!), but it can be helpful to launder these types of products less or keep an eye out for more eco-friendly and organic materials like cotton and linen when shopping for a new outfit.





Laundry Room Checklist

- Air dry clothes instead of using the dryer to reduce energy usage
- Only wash laundry in full loads to make the most of your water and electricity consumption
- Opt for cold water washes vs hot water washes
- Wear your shirts, pants and other clothes multiple times before washing, if possible
- Participate in clothing swaps with friends and family or purchase vintage and used clothes instead of buying new, fast-fashion items
- Avoid clothing and other items made with fabrics that contain microplastics (like nylon, rayon and polyester)
- Opt for more eco-friendly laundry cleaners
 - Use eco-friendly liquid detergents or paper-packaged dry detergents instead of liquids in plastic bottles
 - If using the dryer, skip disposable dryer sheets and invest in a reusable dryer ball for lint collection

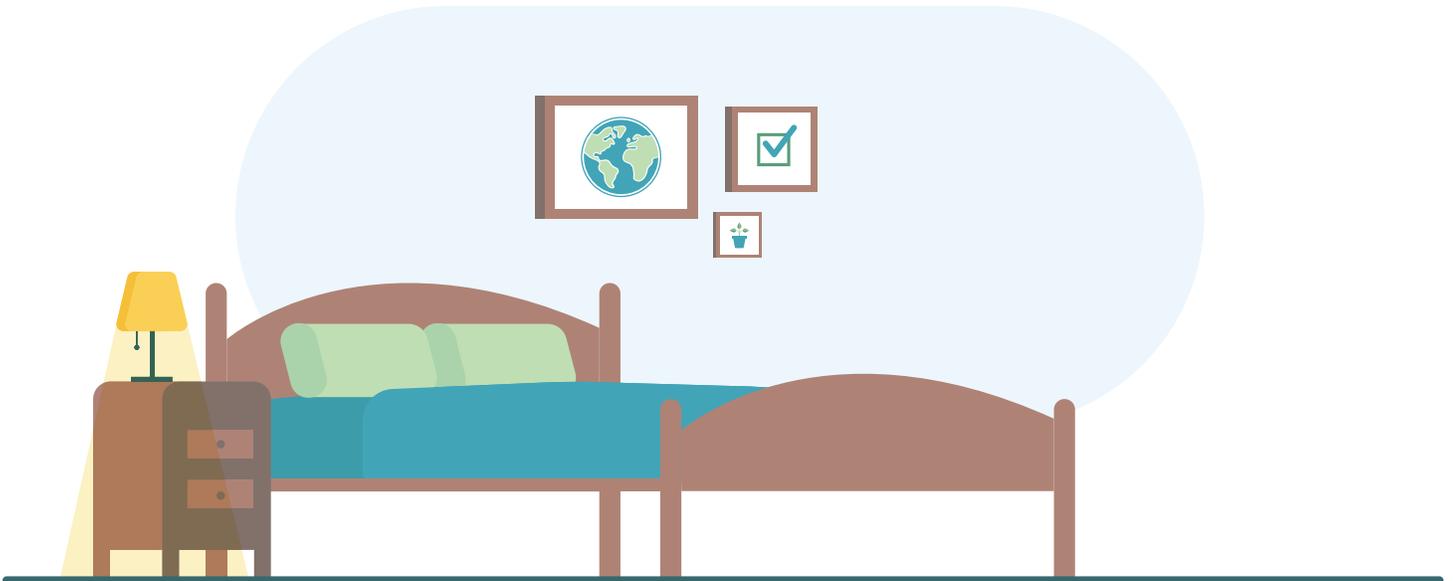
Consider This - Ideas for Super Sustainers

- If in the market for a new washer or dryer, research and consider the most energy-efficient options (or even buying quality used appliances)



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Access a printer-friendly version of this checklist on page 23



Bedroom

Even though our bedroom serves primarily as a sanctuary for sleep, that doesn't mean it's immune from opportunities to address wasteful and unsustainable practices. Whether it's a big decision like purchasing a new mattress or a smaller-scale change related to your heat or electricity, being less wasteful in the bedroom is very achievable — and may even help you sleep better!

Select a Sustainable Mattress for a Better Night's Sleep

Though we don't often upgrade or change mattresses due to their expense and longevity, those in the market for this big bedroom purchase can make a big impact by buying from brands that use eco-friendly materials or production practices. By taking the time to do extensive research and setting standards for your purchase (for your mattress or another big purchase) you can make a choice that is supporting sustainable practices and can lead to less waste in the long run.

Make your sleep sanctuary a sustainability haven with organic or sustainably-sourced bed linens and timers for your lights/electronics!



- Lower the temperature in your bedroom at night to avoid wasting energy when you sleep
- Use easily accessible power strips with on/off switches for bedroom electronics or lamps, or set timers on outlets to prevent unnecessary electricity drain
- Explore sustainable cotton or bamboo fiber sheets instead of those using synthetic fibers
- Consider second hand dressers or repurposing other furniture when outfitting a bedroom
- Make your own bedroom decor repurposing unused frames or making your own craft projects instead of buying new items in stores

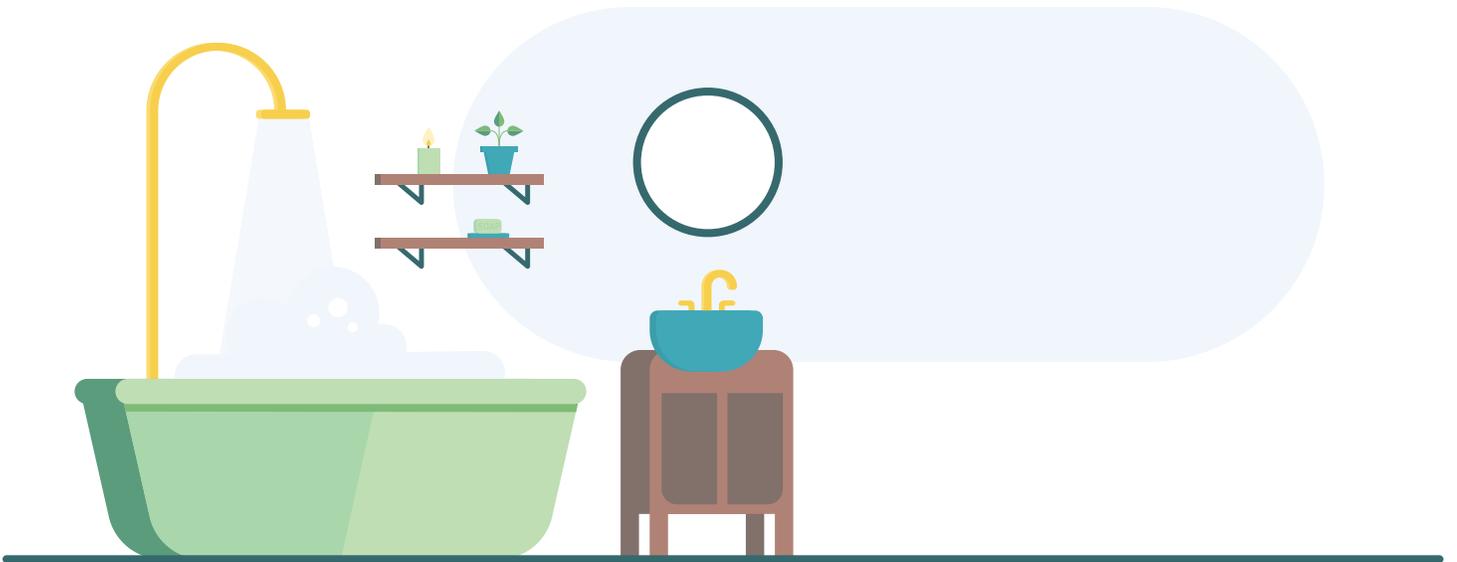
Consider This - Ideas for Super Sustainers

- When upgrading or buying a new mattress, consider investing in an eco-friendly option of high quality that is sustainably produced



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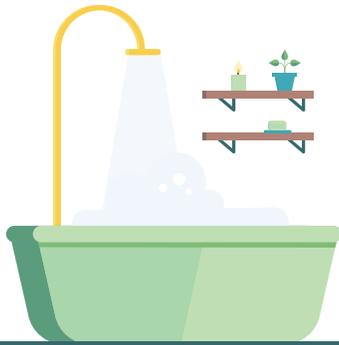
Bathroom

From the sink to the shower, our bathrooms are another key spot in our home where wasteful practices can pile up. For example, an eight-minute shower with a conventional shower head can use as much as 17 gallons of water! Toothbrushes, bath tissue, bathing products and towel choices are just a few of the easy areas you can improve upon to waste less during your self-cleaning routine.

Avoid Plug-in Air Fresheners or Aerosols

While they may help keep your bathroom smelling fresh and inviting, plug-in air fresheners or aerosol sprays are two of the more wasteful products you could use in your bathroom. Plug-in fresheners zap electricity even when they run out of oil or fragrance, which can lead to unnecessary energy usage. Aerosol-based fresheners are often rife with artificial chemicals, which can prove problematic for your home and the environment. Instead, opt for an all-natural candle or essential oil to keep your bathroom smelling better.

Be smart about water use!
Long showers and running faucets can waste GALLONS of water without even knowing it.



Bathroom Checklist

- Use eco-friendly and sustainably-produced products when possible
 - Bar soap instead of body wash in plastic bottles
 - Reusable razors instead of disposables
 - Dental floss made from plants instead of plastic
 - Toothbrushes with bamboo or wooden handle (no plastic)
 - Use refillable soaps and dispensers instead of buying new

- Take shorter showers by using a timer (which you can also use to time toothbrushing!)

- Turn off the faucet when brushing your teeth to conserve water

- Consider using a washable shower liner instead of a disposable plastic one

- Use recyclable toilet paper and compost or recycle cardboard rolls

- Avoid plug-in air fresheners or aerosol products and use a candle or essential oils to prevent wasted electricity or environmental concerns



Save Ink & Cross It Off!

Access a printer-friendly version of this checklist on page 24



Home Office & Workspace

Those of us who have transitioned or adapted to a work-from-home lifestyle know how important it is to cultivate a productive home office or workspace. Cleaning or crafting your work area is also a great opportunity to think about the sustainability of the devices you use and the work habits you maintain. A few simple tweaks — from your furniture and decor to your equipment — can make all the difference.

Be Smart & Sustainable About Equipment and Devices

From the monitor to the printer, all the equipment to make your work-from-home lifestyle productive can use extra energy and make you more wasteful. Do some due diligence around the energy usage of your devices in sleep or standby mode to see if it makes sense to enable these features, or just plug and unplug when not in use. Power strips with switches are great additions to any workspace to ensure you're not wasting extra electricity. And if you're looking to buy new, be sure to review any [EnergyStar](#) certifications for home use or climate pledges as it relates to the device's production.

Big Note Taker? Switch to Dry-Erase

For those of us who still hand-write notes or to-do lists (and don't have ample amounts of scrap paper, sticky notes and notebooks), think about investing in a desk-sized dry erase slate or board to cut down on paper usage. Don't worry: erasing past notes and starting with a clean slate is just as satisfying as crumpling up and recycling paper!



Home Office & Workspace Checklist

- Choose long lasting, quality, durable materials when purchasing office furniture — or better yet, buy used or second-hand furniture
- Use less paper by only printing when absolutely necessary (like only printing the low-ink checklist pages of this guide in the appendix!)
- Properly recycle your used electronics, cords, batteries, ink/toner cartridges at a store that accepts them or a recycling center
- Use the devices and equipment you have for as long as you can rather than upgrading to keep up with the latest and greatest tech
- Turn off your electronics or put in *sleep mode* when not in use
- Review the energy efficiency of your electronics: monitors, chargers, desk lamps, etc.
- Before buying a new paper notepad or sticky notes, consider using scrap paper or investing in a desk-based dry erase board



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Garage, Basement & Outdoors

For homeowners or renters who have a garage or outdoor space, it can be easy to forget how wasteful certain practices or habits may be, especially if you're not avid about utilizing both spaces. Even some of us at Sustainable America sometimes let our garages become "out of sight, out of mind" zones where wastefulness can accumulate. But no longer! With a little bit of persistence and focus, you can be as sustainable outside your home as you are inside it.

Harvest Rainwater to Irrigate your Garden

One of the best sustainable DIY projects for any home gardener is to leverage excess rainwater for your floral or vegetable garden. This can be as simple as placing a bucket at the end of your gutter or as advanced as getting a barrel and building a spigot system to access the excess water. No matter which method you go for, your plants will thank you.

Get Organized to Avoid Buying Excess

We've all come home from the store with new screws, lightbulbs or other things we thought we needed, only to later find that we already had what we needed in the garage or other home storage space. The best way to avoid having this happen over and over again is to get smart about organizing by labeling your boxes and shelves with what you have. That way you can be sure to check (and double-check) before buying more than you need.



Garage, Basement & Outdoors Checklist

- Consider harvesting your own rainwater to irrigate your garden
 - Use a barrel or bucket near your gutters
 - Make a spigot system with a barrel to only use water when needed
- Plant a native plant garden or a food garden instead of maintaining a lawn or meticulous landscaping which requires excessive watering
- Purchase building materials, tools, yard equipment and other items second hand whenever possible
- Repair broken tools instead of replacing them with new ones
 - Using the internet for how-to videos and instruction guides is very helpful for this
 - Take lawnmower blades to be sharpened instead of buying new ones
- Research proper disposal methods in your area for items like used car oil, scrap metal, etc.
 - Be familiar with the recycling system in your area and what can and cannot be accepted or if items need to be sorted
 - Items that are not accepted in municipal recycling are often still recyclable but need to be taken to a special dropoff location
 - Look to commercial composting facilities for larger yard waste to be repurposed rather than sent to a landfill through municipal or organized waste removal
- Keep things organized to avoid buying excess or multiples of the same items (screws, hardware, etc.)
- Have a yard sale to donate unused items rather than throwing them away



Save Ink & Cross It Off!

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Wrap Up

The journey to waste less at home is just beginning. As you implement these tips and considerations throughout your home, feel free to explore other low-waste and zero-waste ideas from books, bloggers, social media users and more. The more ideas and actions you implement, the greater the impact!

Feel free to share your journey, your low-waste ideas or any new tips you come across with us on Instagram [@sustainable_america](https://www.instagram.com/sustainable_america) or Twitter [@foodfuelfuture](https://twitter.com/foodfuelfuture).

Additional Reading & Resources

Food



[*I Value Food*](#)

Fuel



[*I Turn It Off*](#)



[*How Do You Fuel*](#)

Other

[*Zero-Waste Chef*](#)

[*Treading My Own Path*](#)

[*Greenify Me*](#)

[*Going Zero Waste*](#)

[*My Plastic-Free Life*](#)

[*Zero Waste Nerd*](#)

Kitchen & Dining Room Checklist

- Get creative with your leftovers
 - Save and freeze veggie scraps in a sealable bag or container and use to make homemade broth
 - Remix existing sides or ingredients into new meals or recipes (add potatoes or peppers to eggs; use salad green leftovers on sandwiches)
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 - Conduct a food waste audit to assess how you eat and waste food
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- Save candle jars to refill with homemade candle wax, house plants or store small objects

Laundry Room Checklist

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- Participate in clothing swaps with friends and family or purchase vintage and used clothes instead of buying new, fast-fashion items
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- Use eco-friendly laundry detergent and dryer balls instead of sheets if using the dryer
- Use eco-friendly liquid detergents or paper-packaged dry detergents instead of liquids in plastic bottles
- If using the dryer, skip disposable dryer sheets and invest in a reusable dryer ball for lint collection

Consider This - Ideas for Super Sustainers

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Bedroom Checklist

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