



5. Working on the soil bed



6. Soil from first soil bed



7. One of the first beds



8. Transplanting saplings



10. 1st harvest of methi



11. Basil and chilli plants



12. Pumpkin flower



13. Ivy gourd and mustard greens

Talking Trash- 4 | What Can We Do With All That Plastic?

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In the last issue, we discussed several ways in which we can manage our household “paper waste”. In this issue, let us take a closer look at what we can do with all the plastic waste that inevitably enters our homes. Considering the recent ban on plastic, it becomes imperative that citizens make more conscious efforts towards minimizing their plastic usage. However, within days of its implementation, the "ban" has already been diluted. Lobbying by manufacturers has already led to some exceptions to the ban. For example, milk packets and PET bottles are already exempted and now more efforts are being made to include other packaged items under the "exclusion list". Whether we like it or not, we are going to find that plastic makes its way into our homes in several ways. So, here are some methods to tackle the plastic waste in our houses by using the waste hierarchy model to guide our actions.

Prevention by avoiding and refusing

- If and when you are organizing or planning functions (marriages, religious functions etc.) or get-togethers (parties, meetings etc.), make sure to use reusable cutlery and not the disposable plastic ones, especially avoid those small packaged water cups with straws.
- Avoid using plastic cling-on wrap to cover vessels in the fridge. Use regular steel plates instead.
- Refuse plastic bags even if they are offered to you for free by the shop keepers. Always carry your own bag. Eliminate the source of plastic waste that gets generated in your house.

- Be part of the “Refuse the Straw” initiative which has sprung up all over the world. Whether you are enjoying chilled watermelon or ganna juice or tender coconut water, make sure you refuse the straw right at the beginning! Invariably out of habit, the shop keeper is likely to put a straw in your drink and give it to you. There is no point in refusing the straw once it has been handed over to you. So, make sure you refuse the straw right at the beginning! Moreover, you can now find reusable metal and bamboo straws in the market.
- Avoid buying decorative items (festive lights, lanterns) made of plastic.
- Avoid using the shiny plastic gift wrapper.
- Do not use cosmetics that have micro beads (plastic pieces) in them!
- Do not buy vegetables and fruits that come packed in plastic and thermocol. Always try and buy vegetables and fruits in places where they are sold loose.

Minimize

- As much as possible, minimize your habit of buying grains in plastic packets. Instead you can buy the same from grocery stores that stock these grains whole sale. Each time you go shopping, carry with you a cloth bag or a container to keep the grains.
- Minimize the buying of packaged drinking water. Sometimes, it cannot be avoided. But always carry a reusable bottle of water with you when you head outdoors and try to refill the bottle from safe sources of drinking water. Only if drinking water sources are inaccessible, go for bottled water.
- Minimize using plastic (disposable) cutlery when eating outside, for example plastic *chai* cups. Whenever possible, use the glass cups. It is a clever idea to keep a reusable spoon and cup in your bag when you are outdoors.

Reuse

- Ziplock Plastic bags are usually of superior quality and are reusable. Clean them with soap water and reuse them.
- Many of the take-away containers of restaurants and hotels can be reused.
- Thick plastics bags (with name of the shop printed on it) which you are likely to get in big shops or malls are reusable. These are durable and can be used repeatedly.

Recycle

- Milk packets have good resale value. The paper mart or scrap dealer in your area will always be ready to take cleaned milk packets. A couple of years ago cleaned milk packets could be exchanged for garlic. But now-a-days, we find fewer people who make the barter. Always remember to rinse these packets with water and dry them, before you send them for recycling.
- Other items that are usually accepted by our local scrap dealer include: Bubble wrap, plastic containers (ice-cream containers), and PET bottles.



Segregate your plastic waste (plastic bottles, milk packets, other plastic packets)

Upcycle

- Many of our food items (often rice, daal, cereals) and cleaning agents (detergents, washing powder, etc), come in plastic packaging. Some of these plastics are thick and durable. Use your creative mind and upcycle them to products that you will use. For example, if you remember the last issue, we showed you how to upcycle plastic packaging material to bags!
- You can cut plastic bottles in half and use them as planters.
- Another idea is to collect plastic packets and fold them into tiny pieces and stuff them into plastic bottles to make “plastic bricks” which you can later use to make furniture.



Upcycled plastic bags

Disposal

- Many sanitary napkins have components that are made from plastic. Since there are currently no effective ways to manage sanitary waste, the only thing to do is to dispose them responsibly. Ensure that medical and sanitary waste is sufficiently wrapped in newspaper and mark it with a red-coloured X, which will visually signify “danger” or “do not handle”. It is not uncommon in India to see people handling waste, and hence as producers of waste, we must make a commitment towards disposing our waste responsibly.
- And lastly, things like soap covers, combs, book covers, ear buds, chocolate/toffee wrappers, shampoo sachets, toothbrushes, tooth paste tube etc., many of which are everyday use items all bring in their fair share of plastic waste in to our houses. Currently and unfortunately the only route for them is disposal. What we can try to do in general is to minimize our usage of plastic-rich products whenever possible.



From top left, clockwise- Plastic disposable cutlery (to be avoided), packaged vegetables and fruits (to be avoided), packaged drinking water (to be avoided, refused and minimized), plastic decorations (to be avoided), plastic straws and cups (to be refused and minimized).

(Image adapted from: Top left clockwise- Flickr/MPCA Photos, Wikimedia Commons/Flixtey, Wikimedia Commons/Veeven, Flickr/Every Spoon, Wikimedia Commons/Horia Varlan, Wikimedia Commons/Jinymystery)

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