

Don't Mess with Dahab

living with less of a plastic mess

TIPS for using less-plastic and plastic-free alternatives

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TRASH COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

* Hemaya Association is an NGO that deals with solid waste management here in Dahab. If you sort your trash – plastic, metal, glass, and cardboard – you can then call Shargawy at +0122 60 89 204 to arrange free pick-up of your bags from your house.

* REUSE the large flour sacks from the government bakery (*forn*) or ask a shop for a cardboard box to use to sort your trash.

* If you don't want to wait as long for a pick-up, organize with your neighbors and together you'll probably collect enough for more frequent pick-ups.

PLASTIC BAGS

At the supermarket

Here's a summary of tips about REUSABLE bags from Beth Terry's book *Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too*:

- You don't have to buy new bags; use the bags you already have – backpacks, rucksacks, purses, the baskets on your bicycles. We have one old backpack dedicated to shopping. I also use my purse if I'm only buying a few small items.

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- Reuse the plastic bags you already have. Give them a rinse if needed between uses.
- If you need to buy shopping bags, try to buy used bags. There are a few second-hand shops in Dahab, like The Pink Elephant, as well as plenty of Facebook groups where you can buy and sell used goods. (See links at the end of this post.)
- If you can't buy used bags, try your hand at making your own out of old t-shirts. Read instructions here.
- If you need to buy new bags, buy ones made from cotton. Remember to wash your cloth bags. Avoid the polypropylene bags that look like fabric; they are actually made from plastic. They are not washable and they fall apart quickly.
- Put some reusable bags in places that help you remember them. Keep some next to your wallet or keys. Stuff some in your purse. Tie some to your bike handles.
- If you forget your own bags and you aren't purchasing too many items, be like the local kids and use your shirt! Or just carry it in your hands. My husband has, on more than one occasion, taken the cap off his head and filled it with eggs when we have forgotten our bags!

* Bring a reusable container or cotton bag to carry eggs in. Don't worry about the size of the bag. If all you have is a large cotton bag, use it. Just tie the bag in a knot at the top so the eggs are snug and don't roll around.

* Reuse the same plastic bag each time you purchase eggs. Give the bags a rinse if necessary and put them right back in your cotton bag. That way you'll always have a small plastic bag to REUSE for eggs whenever you are at the supermarket.

At the green grocer

* If you have plastic bags at home – or acquire new plastic bags - you can REUSE them. Shake or rinse them out and bring them back to the green grocer with you next time.

* If you forget your reusable bags, try to use less plastic bags by using a single bag for as many vegetables as you can. It's okay to put your tomatoes and cucumbers in the same bag. The eggplant won't mind riding along with the oranges. If there's still room in your bag, go ahead and put the next veggie on top. We always put the heavier fruits and veggies in our bag first so they are on the bottom and not squashing anything underneath.

* When reporting to the green grocer what you have bagged, be prepared to show him what is in your cotton bags, especially if you've managed to put more than one item in a bag. Since the cotton bags aren't see-through like the plastic, sometimes the green grocer wants to check that what you are telling him is what is actually in the bag. Don't be offended. Just open your bag so he can peek inside.

* Take your cotton bags to a green grocer or deli that has digital scales. Ask to weigh your bag and then write - directly on the bag, in permanent marker - how much the bag weighs. That way you won't forget and you won't have to weigh it each time. This is especially useful if you have many reusable bags, all of different sizes and weights. And something I need to remember to do with my own variety of cotton bags!

At restaurants, cafeterias, and take-away

* REFUSE plastic drinking straws. Be sure to tell the waiter BEFORE you order that you do not want a straw with your cold drink.

Street food (*fool*, *tameya*, *koshary*, sandwiches):

* If you don't own any lightweight reusable containers, check to see if you have any old food containers that you can REUSE, for example, the plastic boxes that cheese, sour cream, or *helawa* come in.

* If you forget your own container, check to see if the shop has paper. If they are not too busy, they should be willing

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to use that instead of plastic bags for your order of sandwiches.

* If the shop is really busy when you arrive, be prepared to wait. Interrupting the factory-like production of the sandwiches with a request for no plastic bags is sometimes difficult. Hang in there! And don't be discouraged if your request doesn't always get fulfilled.

* If you carry a backpack or a large purse, put your reusable food containers in the pack before you leave the house in the morning. That way you'll always be prepared for a delicious, nutritious, and plastic-free snack!

PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

Feminine care products

* If possible, make your own reusable cloth pads. If not, purchase some the next time you are abroad and bring them back with you. Or ask a traveling friend or visitor to bring them to Dahab for you.

* Purchase a reusable menstrual cup and have it shipped to an address here in Dahab. Be aware that you may have to pay customs once it arrives. If you'd rather not trust the Egyptian post, buy your cup when you travel home (many of us do at least once a year!) or ask a visiting friend to deliver your cup to you.

* If you want to continue using tampons, choose ones without plastic applicators. That's a lot less waste!

* If you want to continue using pads, choose ones that aren't individually wrapped. Pads are not sterilized so they don't need the extra packaging.

Shaving products

* Stop using disposable razors or razors with disposable blade cartridges. Switch to using a stainless steel safety razor. There is a brand made locally in Egypt, LORD, that is inexpensive and easy to find and use.

PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES

Drinking Well Water

* If you'd like to start using the well water, start by purchasing one of the large blue jerry cans or several of the smaller white jerry cans (if you don't want to deal with moving the weight of the large ones). Next, ask a friend or neighbor for a recommendation for a "water man". If no one has a recommendation, flag a truck down when it passes on your street – listen for the honking of the horns. Get his phone number so that next time you can call for delivery.

* Be aware that the price of the water will vary depending on the source and can range from LE 10 – 20 per 60 liters. Some water comes from wells that are further away and some water comes from wells that contain less minerals and so is more expensive.

* Choose a simple water purification technique. Boiling is one option. Chlorine or household bleach is another. This [Department of Health](#) recommends 5 drops of household bleach per liter.

Returnable Bottles and Bottled Water

* You can purchase water in returnable bottles from Mohsen's place (across from Marine Garden Camp/Karkor the Butcher). You pay a LE 50 deposit per bottle that is returned to you when you bring the bottle back. The water costs

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LE 17 per 19-liter bottle. Or LE 16 per bottle if you are buying 10 or more. For more information, call 01003999803 and ask for Mohsen.

* As a last resort, purchase the largest bottles of water available – at least the 19 L or 6 L bottles. These give you the lowest product-to-packaging ratio.

* Purchase a large water cooler/dispenser, like the TANK brand thermos dispensers, to put in your kitchen. Empty the water from the large bottles into the dispenser. This will make it easier to pour a small amount without having to lift a heavy bottle each time.

* Purchase a reusable water bottle to carry with you. Or use a glass mason jar or other container that you already have. Bring it with you to school, work, or play time at the beach! I also bring my own water bottle with me to restaurants. As long as I am ordering something, no one in Dahab has had a problem with this.

PLASTIC PACKAGING

Food (Supermarkets and Green Grocers)

* Always **buy foods in large-sized packages**. REFUSE the single-serving size. This is especially relevant when buying milk, yogurt, nuts, chips, and juice boxes.

- Buy the 1 ½ liter cartons of milk.
- Buy the largest size of yogurt, at least the 1 kilo container (available from Juhayna).
- Buy the 1 liter cartons of juice, not the individual juice boxes.
- Buy your snacks in the largest bags or containers possible.

* **BULK BAGS:** Use your own bag or container and purchase **flour, lentils, beans, chick peas, karkade, rice, sesame seeds, nuts, popcorn, and spices** from the bulk bags.

* Research what's available in bulk from your favorite shop. Check out other shops if you can't find what you're looking for. Our favorite shop is 1,000 Items (*Alf Sunf*) in Asalah Square.

* Weigh your bag or container first, then add the flour (or whatever you are buying) until you have the desired amount. Our bag weighs 65 grams and we typically buy a kilo of flour. So we fill until the scale reads 1065 g. Sometimes, if a clerk is assisting, they will tare (or zero) the scale with our bag on it. This allows you to just worry about the weight of the contents (in this case, the flour) not the container.

* **BUTTER:** Bring your own container and buy exactly the amount of butter you'd like!

* REFUSE to purchase **bread products** in plastic bags. Bring your own cotton bag or other container to the bakery and fill it with your favorite baked goods – bread sticks, crackers, *fiteer*, sandwich rolls, etc.

* Bake your own **bread**s – flatbreads, tortillas, crackers, etc. - instead of purchasing them in plastic.

* Bring your own REUSABLE containers and purchase **spices** from the bulk bags.

GENERAL KITCHEN AND BATHROOM PRODUCTS

Alternatives to plastic wrap, paper kitchen towels, paper facial tissue

* If you have an old bed sheet lying around that is not in use, cut it into squares and use these cloth squares to cover food dishes, wipe up spills, drain fried food, blow your nose, and more!

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Refuse ~ Reduce ~ Reuse ~ Recycle



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