

No Plastic Challenge - Day 4

Plastic free shopping

Today we will discuss the principles and importance of plastic free shopping and share some tips for reducing plastic packages in your daily life.



What are packages for?

Before we talk about package free shopping, let's discuss why products are packaged in the first place. In case of food, package serves hygienic purposes. The microbes present in the food item cannot be allowed to reproduce too much and spoil the food, and pathogens in the environment must be kept out. The packages of food and non-edible products also have an informative function. The package contains information about the ingredients, what it is used for, how to preserve it, etc. Packaging products in portions, so common in today's world, is probably the result of convenience and the cheap price of plastic. But what if we could do without all this?

What is plastic free shopping?

Nowadays, many many products are packaged in plastic because it is cheap and easy to produce. Plastic free shopping means going to a shop and leaving it without any new plastic packages. In other words, the groceries or other essentials are not packaged at all or come in a more environmentally friendly package (paper, glass, metal). However, it is also important to keep in mind that manufacturing paper bags consumes more water than plastic bags, for example. In case of unpacked goods, the product information is usually written on the larger container where the product is kept.

Several shops are not willing to sell food items into personal packages, but this is actually not regulated by law in Estonia. It is up to each shop to decide.



Which packages are preferable to plastic?



Glass and metal containers can be recycled unlimited number of times and the value of the materials does not decrease; however, it still spends resources. Grabbing a new recyclable container from the store each time is not good for the environment either since its production still requires energy and causes pollution emission. Paper packages can be recycled a

couple of times before they end their cycle as egg cartons. The production of new paper requires felling trees that bind atmospheric CO₂. In short, the best choice for the environment is to use reusable containers.

What can you buy without packages?

Fruits and vegetables are the easiest thing to buy from a regular supermarket without the need for packaging. In some of the larger supermarkets, nuts and dried fruits can also be bought using your own bag. Of course, organic or zero package shops offer a wider selection; there are currently no zero package shops in Estonia but combining supermarket chains with organic shops works well enough. You can often use your own container to buy different other dry goods there as well, such as flour and flakes. You should have your container weighed at the register before filling it up, so that the weight of the package can be subtracted from total weight. This also works for the meat stand. Several dairy products (yoghurt, sour cream, cottage cheese) can be bought in your own container at the market.



But food is not the only thing you need to buy. In organic shops, you can also buy household essentials without plastic container, for example detergent or shower gel. These can be bought just like food items: first you weigh your container and then fill it with the liquid from a large canister. Cosmetics can also be bought using your own container.

In this video, a girl shows how she goes shopping using her own containers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dortUnKnQ28>

Tasks for day 4

1. **Task:** Take a look around your kitchen, cleaning supplies cabinet or cosmetics bag. Do you immediately notice some products that you know can be easily be bought unpackaged or using your own container?

Feedback: Did you find anything? Write to us about which product(s) you found and in which package you would buy them next time.

2. **Task:** Go to the market or grocery store and try to buy a couple of days' worth of groceries as (plastic) packaging free as possible. Bring some food containers, jars, textile and mesh bags. Be ready to tell the cashier that you don't want a plastic bag.

Feedback: Let us know how it went. Will you keep buying some products using your own container?

3. **Task:** Find a nearby shop where you can buy household chemicals with your own container.

Feedback: Let us know which shop you found and what would you buy there next time, using your own containers.

4. **Task:** Identify unreasonable packaging in your local shop or supermarket.

Feedback: Write to the shop or producer and tell them about it. Let us know about what you noticed, in which shop and whom did you write.

Send us your answer to valjakutse@roheline.ee or as a comment in the Facebook group "Roheväljakutse osalejad 2019".

We Expect your answers by the end of Monday (25.11 midnight).

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