

# The *Lotus Live* Guide to **Zero Waste**

(Updated January 18, 2008)

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Beginner's Guide to Zero Waste</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Reduce</i> .....	3
<i>Refuse</i> .....	3
<i>Reuse</i> .....	3
<i>Repair</i> .....	3
<i>Recycle</i> .....	3
<i>Rot</i> .....	3
<b>Expert's Guide to Zero Waste</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Clothing</i> .....	4

## **Introduction**

- The Lotus Live Guide to Zero Waste will help you imagine every possible way you can reduce your waste, to get you thinking about how we can easily reduce waste, and start you down the road to having no waste whatsoever. The guide will have two main chapters - one with general tips and principles, and one with specific tips for everything from clothing to electronics to packaging. The second chapter format is currently showcased in the following clothing example.
- As Lotus Live's knowledge base increases, and as new resources are created, this guide will be updated. The most recent version of this guide can be found [here](#).

## **Beginner's Guide to Zero Waste**

### ***Reduce***

- Reducing means cutting out waste by reducing the amount of stuff you need - buying less crap, and taking less crap from manufacturer's who insist on using more packaging than anyone could ever imagine is necessary.

### ***Refuse***

- Refusing means refusing to use disposables when better options exist. Bringing your own mug to get tea at your local cafe, and refusing to buy bottled water in favor of tap water in a reusable bottle are examples of refusing. See the [REFUSE Pact](#) website for more information.

### ***Reuse***

- Reusing means getting the most bang for your buck by reusing everything you have in creative ways. Through reuse, a torn pair of jeans might become a purse, or a unique wine bottle a unique vase.

### ***Repair***

- Repairing means fixing broken parts to restore function to the whole instead of throwing out the whole just because one part is broken. Instead of throwing out your broken toaster, or sending it to a recycler, see if it's a problem that could be fixed.

### ***Recycle***

- Recycling means extracting the basic building blocks from something, and reconstituting them into a new product - paper is shredded into pulp which makes new paper, and glass is melted down and reformed into new glass shapes.

### ***Rot***

- Rotting means composting - disposing of organic materials the natural way, by letting them decompose into a high quality soil that you can use in your garden.

## Expert's Guide to Zero Waste

### *Clothing*

- **Reduce:** The average person has way more clothing than they need. A recent poll of affluent U.S. households showed that 82% of women own at least 11 pairs of shoes, and 20% have more than 50 pairs (the average is 27). How many shoes do we really need? Before you make any clothing purchase, you should ask yourself if it will really make you happy, and for how long. In most cases, it will not be worth the economic or environmental impact.<sup>1</sup>
- **Refuse:** When buying clothing, you can reduce waste by refusing a plastic bag, and letting the store keep the plastic hanger to be reused.
- **Reuse:** Used clothing that you no longer need is best donated to [Goodwill](#), given away on [Freecycle](#), or sold on [eBay](#), [Craiglist](#), or [Swango](#), a dedicated used clothing site that gives you credits for your clothing that can be used to buy other used clothes. When clothing is too ratty to be worn, it can be used as a cleaning rag (in concert with [green cleaning supplies](#), of course).
- **Repair:** Just because you have a small tear, or a button that has fallen off doesn't mean you should throw out your old shirt - in a very short time, anyone can learn how to fix these problems with a few quick stitches. Shoes can also easily be repaired by a local cobbler.
- **Recycle:** If you have clothing that is more than 90% polyester, you can have your clothing recycled into new clothing with the [Teijin Eco-Circle](#) cradle-to-cradle recycling process. Patagonia's [Capilene](#) apparel is recyclable in this fashion.
- **Rot:** Whenever you can, choose all natural fibers. This way, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that wherever your clothing ends up years after you say goodbye, it will eventually decompose harmlessly.

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<sup>1</sup> [SRBI - "Online Shopping Goes Mainstream"](#) A Time Online Poll of 603 Affluent Households in the U.S.

## About this Guide

*Author:* [Nick Enge](#)

*General References:*

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If you have any ideas, suggestions, or corrections you would like to contribute to this guide on Zero Waste, please send us an email at [waste@lotuslive.org](mailto:waste@lotuslive.org).

Feel free to make use of any of the information in this guide for any purpose--we simply ask that you credit us and our predecessors, and link to us.

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- Drink Containers
- **Refuse/Reuse:** A nice ceramic mug can last a lifetime, replacing the need for thousands of wasteful single-use paper and plastic cups. Some cafés are now offering substantial discounts for bringing your own mug.

## Reuse

For questions about local reuse options, click here [Commonly Asked Questions -- Reuse Options](#).

Reusing items by repairing them, donating them to charity and community groups, or selling them also reduces waste. Use a product more than once, either for the same purpose or for a different purpose. Reusing, when possible, is preferable to recycling because the item does not need to be reprocessed before it can be used again.



Reuse is the second step towards decreasing the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. Many products are designed to be used more than once, like cloth napkins, and others can be put to creative uses after they have performed their original function, like a coffeepot that becomes a flowerpot. After an individual has reduced his or her purchases to

products with the least amount packaging or toxicity, he or she can keep using that product instead of buying another. This will result in less waste, which helps reduce the cost of managing solid waste, conserves materials and resources, and keeps materials out of the landfill. Reusing materials can also save consumers money in the long run!



Here are some tips from the United States Environmental Protection Agency on how to incorporate reuse into your daily lifestyle:

- A sturdy mug or cup can be washed and used time and again. Many people bring their own mugs to work, meetings, and conferences.
- Sturdy and washable utensils and tableware can be used at home and for picnics, outdoor parties and potlucks.
- At work, see if "recharged" cartridges for laser printers, copiers, and fax machines are available. They not only reduce waste, but also typically save money.



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- Cloth napkins, sponges, or dishcloths can be used around the house. These can be washed over and over again.

- Look for items that are available in refillable containers. For example, some bottles and jugs for beverages and detergents are



made to be refilled and reused,

- either by the consumer or the manufacturer.
- When possible, use rechargeable batteries to help reduce garbage and keep toxic metals found in some batteries out of the waste stream. Another alternative is to look for batteries with reduced toxic metals.
- When using single-use items, remember to take only what is needed. For example, take only one napkin or ketchup packet if more are not needed.



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- Reuse paper and plastic bags and twist ties. If it's practical, keep a supply of bags on hand to use on the next shopping trip, or take a string, mesh, or canvas tote bag to the store. When a reusable bag is not on hand and only one or two items are being purchased, consider whether you need a bag at all.
- Reuse scrap paper and envelopes. Use both sides of a piece of paper for writing notes before recycling it. Save and reuse gift

boxes, ribbons, and larger pieces of wrapping and tissue paper.



- Save packaging, colored paper, egg cartons, and other items for reuse or for arts and crafts projects at day-care facilities, schools, youth facilities, and senior citizen centers. Find other uses or homes for old draperies, bedding, clothing, towels, and cotton diapers. Then cut up what's left for use as patchwork, rags, doll clothes, rag rugs, or other projects.
- Reuse newspaper, boxes, packaging "peanuts," and "bubble wrap" to ship packages. Brown paper bags are excellent for wrapping parcels.



- *Reuse it!*
- Wash and reuse empty glass and plastic jars, milk jugs, coffee cans, dairy tubs, and other similar containers that otherwise get thrown out. These containers can be used to store leftovers as well as buttons, nails, and thumbtacks. An empty coffee can make a fine flowerpot.
- Turn used lumber into birdhouses, mailboxes, compost bins, or other woodworking projects.