

Zero Waste Lunches

The Green Notebook

It's back-to-school time and that means lots of lunches to back for many of us. Have you ever heard of a Zero Waste Lunch? I sure hadn't until my son attended a summer camp at Stratford Ecological Center (on Liberty Rd.) a few summer's back. The idea is to pack a lunch that generates no (or very little) trash—everything can be eaten, reused or recycled.

Here's how to pack an eco-friendly lunch:

- Use a reusable lunch box (not a paper bag—unless your student recycles it)
- Pack sandwiches and snacks in reusable containers, like Tupperware or Rubbermaid (or see the ideas below)
- Drinks should be in a Thermos or reusable drink container
- Pack metal or even plastic silverware, if needed, and have your student bring them home to wash and reuse
- Consider using cloth napkins which can also be washed and reused

Things to try to cut down on or avoid all together:

- Juice boxes and bags
- Styrofoam containers and cups
- Plastic baggies
- Aluminum foil (unless your student brings it home to clean and recycle)
- Lunchables and any other packaging
- Individual size containers (applesauce, chips, pudding, yogurt)

I struggle with that last one. That is SO very convenient and I use a lot of individual size containers. But even just raising your awareness is a step in the right direction, right? I know the idea is to buy larger food and drink quantities and then put them in reusable containers for lunch. I'll get there.

When researching this on the internet, I was simply amazed at the number of schools across the country and around the world that have implemented a Zero Waste Lunch Policy. One school in California reduced its volume of trash from 8 55-gallon cans down to one. Wow!

Here are some cool ideas for "green" lunch gear:

- www.reusablebags.com offers brightly-colored snack boxes, drink containers and other items
- www.wrap-n-mat.com has cool reusable sandwich wraps that are Velcro-closed and lined with food-grade plastic for easy clean-up—and open into a placemat
- www.laptoplunches.com was created by two moms and sells a lunch system that is an Americanized version of the Japanese bento box
- Rubbermaid offers TakeAlongs at Wal-Mart and Target and Tupperware has some neat lunch ideas

Happy packing!

Tuesday Trippier lives in Delaware, is a writer, wife and mother of three with an interest in green living.