

Reducing Single-Use Plastic at Events in Ajax

A Plastic Reduction and Awareness Toolkit





Welcome to the first step in reducing your plastic waste

Welcome to the Plastic Awareness and Reduction Toolkit (PART) for Events! This toolkit was created with both residents and businesses in mind, to help provide information and resources to reduce plastic and single-use items in event planning. The intention of the toolkit is not to remove plastics from our lives completely, but to be more aware of the products we choose, particularly those that are disposable after one use.

We know the power of community and how impactful a network of people and businesses can be in enacting change. We're happy you're taking the time to join the mission to eliminate plastic pollution in Canada and be a part of that change by exploring the suggestions and tips provided in this toolkit. Together, we can tackle unnecessary plastic waste to promote plastic-free land and seas!



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This toolkit has been developed by the Canadian not-for-profit and registered charity, Mind Your Plastic, in collaboration with the Town of Ajax. Mind Your Plastic's mission is to eliminate plastic pollution in Canada. Our advocacy includes connecting with municipal governments to promote policies that better regulate materials used in our economy, working alongside Canadian businesses to give consumers better plastic-free choices, and providing direct action programming like our Circular Economy Ambassador Program. Together, we are moving towards a plastic pollution-free future.

The Town of Ajax, located in the Regional Municipality of Durham, has been a Canadian leader in adopting policy to reduce the amount of single-use plastics entering our environment. Mind Your Plastic is thankful for the opportunity to work alongside the Town of Ajax on this important issue.

The Problem with Single-Use Plastics

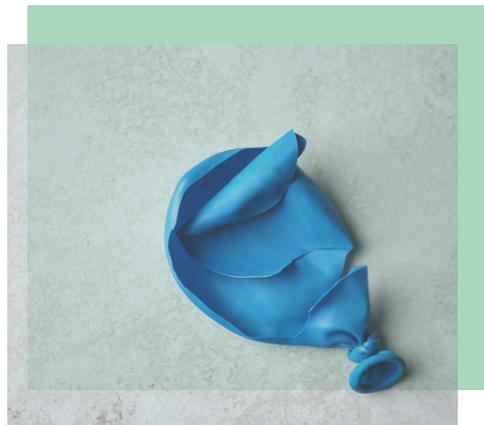
Our dependence on single-use plastics is present in every aspect of our lives. From takeout coffee cups, to straws and plastic cutlery, to cotton swabs, disposable plastics are found everywhere. Knowing the damage that plastics can cause to our environment, many people are shifting their everyday consumption habits to make the move away from single-use items and plastics. One area that is often overlooked when changing buying habits is during events and celebrations such as birthday parties, family reunions, and weddings. When planning events and celebrations, the impact of the disposable materials and decor we purchase doesn't take priority over their convenience and accessibility of single-use items. The downside to this, is that most events become a major source of plastic waste.

From foodware to decor, much of the party planning process revolves around single-use items. Plastic plates, cups, and cutlery are all put in the trash at the end of an event. The same happens to most decorations like balloons. With no other options for end-of-life disposal, these single-use plastics are sent to landfill, contributing to the influx of macro and microplastics leaking into our environment.

On June 20th, 2022, Environment and Climate Change Canada announced a federal ban on six of the most common single-use plastics. The ban will prohibit the manufacture, sale, and import of plastic checkout bags, cutlery, foodservice ware, ring carriers, stir sticks, and straws (with the exception of flexible straws for accessibility). This is a crucial first step to eliminating problematic single-use plastics from our daily lives.

Working together as a community and making a commitment to reduce our plastic footprint is essential. Community events are an important opportunity to gather and celebrate together. However, our celebrations don't have to come at the cost of our environment.

By following the Town of Ajax's [Corporate Ban on Single-Use Plastics](#), and making a shift towards more reusable materials, we can eliminate wasteful single-use plastics and host events that produce less plastic pollution! This toolkit will provide you with some of the resources to go plastic-free and understand how you can plan an event without single-use items.



Following the Waste Hierarchy

One of the most valuable things we can do as consumers, is be conscious of the products we purchase and our buying habits. We have a natural tendency to want new and exciting items, particularly for special events, instead of using the things we already have. This is especially important when we think about how many single-use items and plastics are purchased every day. A great way to better understand how we can limit our purchases of new, single-use items, is to think of every potential purchase through the lens of the waste hierarchy!

The waste hierarchy is a ranking of the available waste management options based on their value. The Region of Durham has established the 5Rs Waste Hierarchy to rank your local waste options. At the top of the hierarchy are the most favourable options that conserve more resources and prolong the life of the items we already have. The options that prevent and eliminate waste include Rethink, Reduce, and Reuse. At the bottom of the 5Rs hierarchy are Recycle and Recover, which are less favourable options because waste is still generated. Using a tool like the waste hierarchy allows us to pause and think about the best way to avoid single-use, disposable options.



Durham Region's Waste Hierarchy



5Rs in the Waste Hierarchy



- **Rethink**: Diverting waste by rethinking your daily habits– eliminating unnecessary purchases, limiting necessary purchases, and switching to eco-friendly alternatives.
- **Reduce**: Limiting the waste you produce in your daily life to decrease the amount of waste that enters landfills.
- **Reuse**: Switching from disposable or single-use items to items that are reusable– repurposing or repairing is also valuable.
- **Recycle**: Disposing of recyclable materials through the proper methods.
- **Recover**: Removing any remaining valuable resources from the item before disposal.

Following the Waste Hierarchy

Is it possible to rethink single-use items and plastics?

Can single-use items and plastics be avoided completely by making deliberate, sustainable choices for decor and foodware at your event? There are so many innovative, zero-waste options to consider when hosting an event, it's a great opportunity to get creative and go plastic-free.

Is it possible to reuse items instead of single-use?

Supplying your own reusables for food and decor is optimal— in terms of both cost and sustainability. This could mean reusing what you have, or borrowing from another person or organization. If an event is held every year, the decorations can be saved to reuse the following year. Decor like lights, drapery, and chalkboard signs can all be reused and reconfigured to create a new arrangement every time. Renting tableware, dinnerware, and decor is another fantastic option to ensure zero plastic waste is generated by your event.

Selecting recyclable materials as a last resort

In the absence of accessible or affordable reusable materials, there may be circumstances where single-use items need to be used. If this is the case, the items selected should be easily recycled or composted. Compostable single-use plastics, plastic-lined paper items, and other hard-to-recycle products should not be purchased.



Is it possible to reduce the amount of single-use items and plastics?

Single-use items may seem unavoidable, but there are ways to reduce. Buying in bulk is a great way to reduce single-use items, eliminating small individual servings or packets in favour of one larger bulk item. Staying vigilant, doing research about alternatives, and not purchasing products with visibly excessive packaging is another strategy. Planning ahead of time allows us to be more conscious consumers, instead of buying single-use supplies out of convenience.

Is it possible to repurpose or repair instead of single-use?

Creating new and functional items out of older, broken ones. This is seen a lot in the recent trend of using vintage decor. Instead of plastic streamers and disposable balloons, thrifting or upcycling old windows, picture frames, and mirrors can create long-lasting event decor. Using older items for a different purpose prevents not only new disposables from entering the landfill, but also provides a new life for older, vintage items that appeared to have no value.

Disposal only where necessary

Landfill should be the very last waste management option for event materials. We want to exhaust all other options before selecting a product we know will end up as garbage. If an item must be landfilled after one use, we are getting no further value from that material, and the resources used to make it are not being maximized. With that in mind, items that must be landfilled at end-of-life need to be placed in the garbage. These materials can contaminate other waste streams when they are not correctly sorted.

Guide to Selecting Event Decor



The first question to ask when selecting decor for your event: How will this decor be disposed of at the end of your event, and is it necessary?

Is the decor or event accessory necessary?

- If your party decor can only end up in the landfill after it's been used, is that item necessary? For example, are plastic coated ribbons really needed on gift bags? There are many opportunities to reduce the amount of single-use items we lean on to make things more celebratory or festive. Maybe we don't need the plastic noisemakers, or plastic-filled loot bags to make the party. If we want to add an extra special frill to a gift or an event, we can make more thoughtful choices that are personalized, longer lasting, and more meaningful to the event.

Can the decorations be plastic-free?

- Items such as balloons and plastic confetti poppers will end up in the garbage at the end of the party, having been used only once. More natural options are available—dried flowers are a great replacement for confetti and glitters. Bubbles are another great idea that provide the same celebratory feeling as confetti, but without the excessive waste— they can also be made at home in a pre-loved container with just water and dishwashing soap.
- Fireworks are another plastic waste culprit. While providing a spectacular display at events, fireworks are made of many small plastic pieces that end up littering their launch site. Where these pieces can be found and collected, they are often contaminated by chemicals and should not be recycled with other materials. Many municipalities have banned fireworks in parks and beaches, where there is a higher risk of wildlife consumption or leakage of plastic waste into lakes and rivers. Replacing fireworks with waste-free options such as a laser show or a drone display are recommended for larger events. For smaller events, consider replacing fireworks with reusable, LED light sparklers or projector lights.

Guide to Selecting Event Decor

Can the decor be replaced with more durable, multi-use, or easily reused and composted materials?

- For example, instead of hanging plastic streamers at a holiday party, look at more traditional, pre-plastic decoration ideas. Things like pinecones and fallen pine branches are extremely festive and generate no waste if they are composted or placed back in nature to decompose. Additionally, decorations can become a fun do-it-yourself project, if we look at decorations of the past. For example, making popcorn to make a garland or baking orange slices to string and hang as decor.

Can the decor be donated or sold to someone else for use at the end of the event?

- There are many great ways to donate or resell the decor from your event. Posting the decor for sale online through free marketplaces or apps such as Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji, or [VarageSale](#) gives your event decor a second life, and allows you to recuperate some of the money invested, instead of landfilling the decor and losing its value. Ask friends and family if they have any events planned where the decor could be used again. Donation is another great option to ensure that the decor is reused.

Event decor doesn't need to be wasteful to be exciting and festive! With a bit of thought and planning, materials that will last longer and are better for the environment can easily be identified to replace single-use plastics. Together, we can eliminate plastic waste one event at time.



Alternatives to Single-Use Plastics

Best Alternatives

Reusables

- Provide reusable foodware and drinkware at events (owned or rented)
- Participate in an existing reusables program (rented, borrowed, purchased secondhand, or through a deposit-refund system)
- Use event decor that can be reused and refashioned every year or can be passed onto someone else to reuse
- Utilize innovative solutions such as beeswax wraps instead of plastic cling film and bulk condiment stations instead of individually packaged portions
- Ensure that the reusables are durable and can be reused and washed
- Important that the reusables are made of a material that can be recycled when it reaches end-of-life



Good Alternatives

Recyclable and compostable alternatives

- Use recycled and recyclable paper items where possible
- Paper food ware and napkins are good alternatives that can be composted (not recycled) with food residue
- Non-lined paper, paperboard products, and bamboo materials
- For information about what materials can be recycled in Ajax, visit the Region of Durham's [Know Before You Throw guide](#)
 - You can type in the waste material you're unsure about, and the guide will tell you if it should be recycled, composted, or landfilled



Alternatives to Avoid

Unsustainable, disposable single-use items

- Other non-banned single-use plastics such as single-use beverage bottles and caps, condiment sachets, plastic food pouches, plastic films and food wraps, etc.
- Non-plastic single-use items that are not recyclable or compostable
- Resource-intensive materials as single-use items (e.g. absolutely no single-use glass or single-use stainless steel items)
- "Compostable" plastics, that cannot actually be composted locally, despite misleading labelling



Alternatives to Single-Use Plastics

Examples of Best Reusable Alternatives

Porcelain/ceramic, stainless steel, and recyclable, durable plastics (e.g. polypropylene cups, hard plastic plates, food baskets, etc.) are common reusable solutions.

Porcelain/ceramic plates are great for indoor, seated events where collection and management of supply are easy to control, and there are not as many opportunities to drop or break a plate. For outdoor events and vendors, durable plastic or wooden plates are a great alternative, as well as plastic and metal food baskets.

Stainless steel cutlery is an optimal option for all events and vendors. After the cutlery is used, it can be collected in a separate bin, clearly marked as used, and washed following the event.



There are several different types of reusable cups and mugs that can be used at events. Beverage containers can range from durable plastic cups, to porcelain mugs, to reusable stainless steel tumblers. Depending on the event and the number of attendees, the choice of reusable beverage container may differ.

Reusable cups are a sustainable and accessible solution because most people have them available to bring from home. Even where there's no budget to rent or acquire reusable items, you can ask those attending to bring their own reusable mug or cup.



There are many events items and accessories that can be replaced with reusables.

Individually wrapped food accessories can be upgraded to bulk serving stations with bottles of your favourite sauces or coffee toppings. The same can be applied to beverage serving stations for water or juice. Allowing event attendees to self-serve also reduces the amount of waste created by vendors providing excessive accessories with an order. The attendee gets the exact amount they need without any packaging!



Foodware

Drinkware

Misc. items

Greenwashing and Wish Cycling

When looking at the variety of alternatives available, it's also important to recognize that some materials are often mislabelled. Products labelled "sustainable" or "environmentally friendly" often have no real verified meaning. This is particularly true for products and packaging that are made of plastic and have labels claiming that it's recyclable or compostable in some regions. No clear disposal instructions on the packaging is an indicator that the material is not likely to be processed accurately in your local waste system.

Greenwashing: A business advertising an unsubstantiated claim that tricks consumers into believing that their products and packaging are environmentally friendly or sustainable.

Wish cycling: Putting an item in the recycling, hoping it will be recycled with little to no evidence that the material can be recycled.

Many businesses will use this greenwashing strategy to convince customers that their product is better for the environment than others. In reality, the landfill is the only appropriate waste management option, just as it is for single-use items. There is a growing trend of moving to single-use "compostable" plastics, but most of these options are actually not compostable at home or at your local compost facility. It's best to stay away from alternatives that don't have certifications or standards that clearly guarantee recyclability or backyard compostability.

There's so much confusion around the recyclability and compostability of single-use items, sometimes it seems easiest to recycle the material, hoping that it will be recycled or find its way to the proper waste stream in the process. Unfortunately, this practice results in contamination of the recycling stream, forcing recyclable materials to become landfill. Clear standards and labels on our products are the best way to help us to avoid wish cycling.



Resources

Reusables supplier list:

- This supplier list is by no means exhaustive, but a selection of reusable options in the Town of Ajax and Durham Region.
- Any supplier looking to be added to this list can reach out to the Ajax Sustainability Team.

Local reusable service providers for larger events: Businesses such as [Friendlier](#), [DreamZero](#), or [Muuse](#) are based out of the Greater Toronto Area and provide reusables for specific venues and events. These types of service providers may be a great option for larger community events that take place in a closed event ecosystem, where cups and food ware can be used and returned efficiently.



Single-Use Swap Pledge:

- Take the Mind Your Plastic Single-Use Swap Pledge to demonstrate your commitment to planning an event that eliminates single-use waste and pollution!
- Receive a certificate to show event attendees and other vendors that you're a leader in plastic pollution reduction.



Resources for residents:

- Town of Ajax's [Useful Resources on SUPs](#)
- [The Story of Plastic \(Animated Short\)](#)
- [Banning balloons at your event](#)
- Great ways to teach children about plastic waste:
 - [A Whale's Tale | S1 - E10 - Hope Works | Watch | CBC Kids](#)
 - [DIY Paper Pom Pom Decorations | Kids Vs. Plastic](#)
 - [Throw a kids party with zero waste \(Video\)](#)

For more information about how you can help eliminate plastic pollution, please check out the [Mind Your Plastic website](#), as well as [Ajax's Single-use Plastic website](#) to stay updated on the action happening in your community and across Canada.

