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Down to Humus

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"The word 'humble' comes from 'humus' derived from the Latin meaning earth or ground. Humus is matter essential for fertility of the soil. It is integral to the cycle of life; plants need it for growth…Thus it is appropriate that in our mission statement, we commit ourselves to care for the earth itself." -Bernadine Pieper, CHM. Taken from The Humility Woman Booklet, page 3.

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Zero-Waste at Work: Building Greener Offices

Autumn often feels like a fresh start. As summer schedules shift into structured routines, workplaces buzz with new projects and full calendars. It's also the perfect time to take stock of our daily habits at the office and ask: how can we lighten our footprint at work?

While we tend to think of recycling as the main solution, studies show that reducing waste in the first place has a far greater impact. The average U.S. office worker uses 10,000 sheets of paper every year, and office buildings produce nearly 80 million tons of waste annually. From paper to packaging to food scraps, the office is a prime place to model care for Earth through small but meaningful changes.

Rethinking Office Supplies

- The modern workplace is filled with disposable items—sticky notes, plastic pens, paper clips and packaging that arrives with every shipment. Many of these end up in landfills within weeks. A zero-waste mindset means asking: what can be reused, refilled, or avoided altogether?
- Paper and printing. Share files digitally whenever possible. When printing is necessary, use double-sided and black-and-white settings. Keep a box of single-sided paper near printers for drafts or note-taking.
- Refillables. Swap single-use pens and highlighters for refillable versions. Even staplers and tape dispensers last longer when chosen for durability instead of disposability.



- Shared resources. Offices can reduce supply waste by maintaining a "take-and-leave" shelf where extra binders, folders, or paper trays can be reused by others instead of tossed.

Greener Break Rooms

- The office kitchen or break room is another hotspot for waste. Coffee cups, plastic utensils and endless takeout containers quickly pile up. With just a few adjustments, the break room can become a model of sustainability.
- Mugs and dishes. Encourage staff to bring a favorite reusable mug, water bottle and set of utensils. Stocking the break room with washable dishes and silverware can cut down dramatically on disposables.
- Smart coffee choices. Single-serve plastic pods are convenient but generate mountains of plastic. Opt for drip machines, French presses, or compostable pod options.

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- Waste-free lunches. Bringing meals in reusable containers eliminates packaging and usually saves money compared to daily takeout. When dining out, carrying a reusable container for leftovers keeps Styrofoam boxes out of the trash.

Tackling Food Waste

- Food scraps are one of the most common forms of office waste. Simple shifts can reduce what ends up in the garbage:
- Encourage employees to plan smaller portions and label food clearly in the fridge to avoid spoilage.
- Set up a compost bin for fruit peels, coffee grounds and biodegradable scraps. If the office doesn't have outdoor space, partner with a local farm, garden, or composting service for pick-ups.
- Hold occasional "clean-the-fridge lunches" where leftovers are shared rather than discarded. It builds camaraderie while reducing waste.

Smarter Shipping and Purchasing

- Workplaces that order supplies, ship packages, or handle inventory can reduce their footprint by rethinking procurement:
- Order in bulk to reduce packaging waste.
- Reuse shipping boxes and packing materials whenever possible.
- Choose vendors that minimize unnecessary packaging or offer recyclable materials.
- Establish an office-wide purchasing policy that favors eco-friendly products—from recycled paper to biodegradable cleaners.

Commuting with Care

- Getting to and from work is another opportunity to reduce impact. Encouraging carpooling, public transit, or biking a few days a week cuts emissions while saving employees money. Some workplaces even offer incentives for green commuting, such as preferred parking for carpools or small stipends for transit passes.

Modeling Sustainability

The office is more than just a place to complete tasks—it is a community. When one person brings a reusable water bottle, it's noticed. When a department decides to print less, others often follow. Zero-waste habits are contagious, and workplaces provide a natural stage for demonstrating them. The ripple effects reach beyond office walls, as employees carry these practices into their homes and communities.

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Packed in a reusable container, this slaw is a crunchy, no-waste dish that celebrates the flavors of fall while supporting your eco-friendly routine.



Recipe Spotlight: Apple & Cabbage Slaw with Toasted Walnuts

Ingredients

3 cups shredded cabbage (green or purple)
2 crisp apples, thinly sliced
½ cup shredded carrots
¼ cup toasted walnuts
2 Tbsp dried cranberries
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp honey or maple syrup
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

- In a large bowl, toss cabbage, apples, carrots, walnuts, and cranberries.
- In a small jar, shake together olive oil, vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper.
- Pour dressing over salad and toss well.
- Chill for 15 minutes before serving.

This refreshing salad makes a colorful lunch, keeps well in the office fridge and travels easily in a reusable container.