



The Truth About Reuse

As we make our way towards the happiest time of the year, Earth Month, the Office of Sustainability wants to remind everyone of the importance of the 5 Rs. The 5 Rs are Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot (Compost), & Rebuy. The 5 Rs are a hierarchy, in which the order is very intentional. The R's that are listed first, reduce and reuse, have a greater positive impact on the environment than those listed later on, rot (compost) and rebuy. Today we will be talking about the benefits, perceived barriers, and best practices of reuse.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), [reuse has many benefits such as reducing greenhouse gases, pollution, and energy all while saving money](#). Although there are multiple benefits of reuse, often reusables can be touted as inconvenient or even unsanitary, the Office of Sustainability is here to dispel those myths.

Often there is an impression that disposable single-use items are perfectly sterile or at the very least much cleaner than reusable options. However, as [this article from Wired](#) points out "No disposable package is today sterile [unless explicitly marked as such]". Typically all reusable items need a good wash with soap and water.

As for reusable items perceived as an inconvenience, that will depend on how a space or environment is set up. If we are intentional about providing reusable options at convenient times and locations the perceived barrier of inconvenience can be easily removed. For example, if there are reusable mugs close by the coffee machine it will be easy for folks to choose a reusable option. In preparation for Earth Month in April let's focus on getting our homes, offices, and ourselves set up with reusable options this March. Below are a few tips for adding reuse into your life at work and home.

Reuse tips for work

1. Check for existing reusables
2. Bring a reusable water bottle or mug with you
3. Leave reusables in your bag or at the office

For more tips, check out our [responsible purchasing guidelines](#).

Reuse tips for home

Do a waste audit to assess what you could switch to reusable

1. Start with what's easy to switch to reusable first
2. When ordering takeout, request no single-use utensils

Switching to reusable alternatives can seem like a daunting task at first, so be sure to take it one item at a time. Over time you will likely see a change in your habits and a bigger change in your waste generation.

Author: Cypress Wessberg
wessberg@stanford.edu